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THE BEQUEST OF

EVERT JANSEN WENDELL
(CLASS OF 1882)

OF NEW YORK

1918

That Frenchman!

A Novel

BY

ARCHIBALD CLAVERING GUNTER

AUTHOR OF

"MR. BARNES OF NEW YORK"

"MR. POTTER OF TEXAS," ETC

NEW YORK

THE HOME PUBLISHING COMPANY

3 EAST FOURTEENTH STREET

1889

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Press of J. J. Little & Co.,
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THAT FRENCHMAN!

BOOK I.

THE FLOWER GIRL OF THE JARDIN D'ACCLIMATATION.

CHAPTER I.

AN AMATEUR DETECTIVE.

"O-O-O-AUGH!" The first of this is a sighing moan; the second a sudden vocal twist and snap of the jaws; the whole a prolonged yawn.

"Monsieur!" remarks the valet deferentially.

"What time is it?"

"Seven o'clock!"

"*Seven o'clock!* Why the devil are you disturbing me at seven o'clock in the morning? Sapristi! Don't you know I only returned from Madame d'Indra's ball at three, François?" mutters Maurice, Le Chevalier de Verney in a half-asleep tone, rolling over on his luxurious pillows for another nap.

"Monsieur, the head of secret police wishes to see you immediately. He will not be denied!"

"*Le Diable!* Show Monsieur Claude in at once!" cries Maurice springing over the bed with an athletic bound. "My dressing-gown—and now let me see the autocrat of the Rue de Jérusalem!"

François salutes with military grace and passes to the

door of the handsome bed-room. Here he pauses and says in a tone of affectionate anxiety: "Monsieur de Verney—my—my master—you—you have not compromised yourself politically? You have not displeased the Emperor?"

"Not I!" laughs the young man. "My eagerness is that of joy—I—I love the secret police, and the head of it most of all."

The servant has turned to go when there is a bound behind him, he feels his arm gripped as by a vise of steel, he is swung round as if by the power of a whizzing fly-wheel, and is gazing amazed into his master's face.

"François—remember!—military secrecy—not a word of this visit to any one on earth!"

"Y-e-es! Monsieur Commandant! But — my — my arm!" and the man, though a veteran of the French army in the Crimea and Algeria, almost groans with pain.

"Your pardon!" says his master apologetically; "I had no idea I had used any great strength."

"Any great strength!" gasps François; "my arm has been in a vise." Here he rubs the affected member. "*Mon Dieu!* Monsieur is like Hercules in the paintings at the Louvre!"

This is rank flattery, for Maurice de Verney is not over five feet ten, and his physique, at first glance, does not appear marvelous under his silken dressing-gown. He says, a little impatiently, "Quick! the head of the police must not be kept waiting!"

And as the servant leaves the room the master with a little laugh lights a cigar, and popping his feet into slippers sinks into an arm-chair before the freshly lighted fire to await the coming of the man, perhaps the most feared in the Paris of 1868, Monsieur Claude, the nominal head of the "*Bureau de Sûreté*" under the Second Empire.

A moment after, this gentleman cautiously shoves his head through the half-opened *portières* that separate the large luxurious bedroom from the larger and more luxurious parlor. His glance, professionally inquisitive, takes in the room and its occupant, first generally, then in detail.

Monsieur Claude's primal impression is that the chamber he is looking into is that of an effeminate dandy. The room is furnished with that delicate, graceful luxury

peculiar to the Second Empire of France, which has, in the last twenty years, impressed itself upon the whole modern fashionable world, and can now be seen not only in dukes' palaces in England, the mansions of New York millionaires, the villas of cattle-trust butchers in Chicago, the railroad syndicates' and bonanza kings' adornments of Nob Hill, San Francisco, but even in the houses of Australian magnates of many sheep-ranges, and the bungalows of rich opium-smuggling European, Chinese, and Indian merchant princes—in fact, wherever there is money enough to pay for silken hangings, bric-a-brac, marquetry, tapestry, and furniture in appearance light and graceful enough to bend to the forms of fairies, but strong enough to bear the weight of average men and women—even fat ones.

The room is a mass of satin—pale blue hangings on the walls ; pale amber draperies and upholsteries on the bed and furniture, save where it is given variety of form by the white ivory and gold of carved wood-work and gilded metal, or broken here and there by patches of color in the form of delicate pictures from the hands of masters of the modern French school of painting—which is as much ahead of that of the old Flemish as modern science is beyond old alchemy, if we had but the courage to think so, and dared judge by our eyes and not by our reverence for ancient humbug.

At first glance this is the appearance of the room, but a longer gaze adds a peculiar effect to the chamber : its satin hangings are held up by Arab spears ; its curtains fall from Algerine match-locks—not the imitation ones of a Parisian upholsterer, but real ones, that have been used in war and bear the scars of combat upon their dark old barrels and uncouth stocks. From the horns of the antelope, deer and stag, hang rapiers, swords and pistols ; while near the bed, and convenient to the hand of its owner, is placed the saber of a cavalry officer and a heavy, six-shooting, dragoon revolver, from Mr. Colt of America. Both of these seem ready for instant use in emergency. Sandwich among the most exquisitely beautiful pictures a dozen atrocious wood-cuts from English Boxiana, showing the heroes of the British prize-ring in fighting attitudes ; add to this a magnificent lion's head with its tawny skin attached, which is thrown before the

grate; toss carelessly about the room a couple of pairs of English boxing-gloves, several Indian clubs of assorted sizes, dumb-bells ranging in weight from three to one hundred and fifty pounds; sling from the ceiling a punch-bag such as prize-fighters train with; in the midst of this conglomeration inject a few French novels of Monsieur Paul de Cock, Balzac, and Eugene Sue, together with works of Taine, Voltaire, and Guizot, seasoned with "Le Prince," of wicked, philosophical Machiavelli; elevate this by Macaulay's "History of England," together with two or three scientific works, and "A Treatise on the Calculus," by La Place; and in the middle, as a center-piece, place a gay young man with an Anglo-Saxon forehead, the face of a philosopher, the eyes of a lover, and the jaw of a warrior, robed in a light, pale, harmonious-blue dressing-gown, upon his feet slippers of amber-colored satin, who is lazily smoking a cigar and gazing fondly upon a rose-bud he has picked from a table covered with flowers, and you have the picture that petrified Monsieur Claude, the head of the French police.

After a minute of surprised contemplation and savage chewing of his grizzled mustache, Monsieur Claude mutters to himself: "The Jack o' dandy!—is he a mountebank or a Napoleon the First?"

Then he steps into the apartment and says effusively, "My dear de Verney, my unexpected visit——"

"Was *expected!*" remarks Maurice calmly. "Take a cigar!"

At this, the supposed wise man of Paris gives a gulp of astonishment, murmurs faintly, "You know, then?" and sinks, overcome with wonder, into a chair.

"What the devil did he come for?" meditates de Verney, looking at the collapsed head of secret police. "All the same, when you wish to impress a man who is supposed to know everything, it is best to appear to know a little more than he does. Perhaps he'll tell me all now without pumping." Then he says aloud, "Take a cigar, my dear Monsieur Claude, and come to business!"

"No—no cigars," returns the visitor dejectedly.

"Ah! then, perhaps you'll have something to drink?" and Maurice, ringing, says to his servant, "François, a glass of Bordeaux for Monsieur Claude!" The valet having gone, he turns to his guest and remarks causti-

cally, "You need some stimulant. You have been out all night!"

"How did you learn that?" returns Monsieur Claude, suspiciously pulling his whiskers, that are slightly grizzled; for the chief of police is nearly fifty, while the gentleman he has called on is, by his appearance, in the very acme of youth—*i. e.*, about twenty-seven. At which age, man, properly trained, properly nourished, and unexhausted by dissipation and debauchery, is, if not at his highest state of mental development, at least at his climax of physical vigor and muscular activity.

"I should have guessed it if I had not seen you before. You have an all-night appearance, Monsieur Claude; your hair needs brushing—your coat also," remarks de Verney with a smile; "but behold the wine!—François, put the bottle and glasses on the table and see that I am not disturbed!" And, his servitor withdrawing, his master cautiously closes and locks the door after him, then returns, and, sinking lazily into a chair, drawls out, "*Besides, I saw you at work!*"

At this, the head of the secret police springs up in astonishment, almost staggers to the table, hastily gulps down two glasses of claret, forgetting in his agitation to note that it is Lafitte, of the grand vintage of '53, and then gasps: "You saw me—when—where?"

"At a quarter to three this morning—at the Rue de Maubeuge, just where it leaves the Rue de Faubourg Montmartre."

"*Le Diable!*"

"Yes—you and your satellites at work, Monsieur Claude—upon the person of—of Monsieur Her—Hermann—"

"Margo!" cries the chief of police.

"Which, by the by, isn't his right name," remarks de Verney, sharply closing his speech, and at last being sure he has guessed the matter about which the chief of police has come.

"How the deuce—did you see all this?" ejaculates the chief of the *Bureau de Sûreté*.

"Are yours the only eyes in Paris?" laughs Maurice. "You Solomons of the Rue de Jérusalem think you are the only beings in France blessed with the sense of sight. You may be watched as sharply as you inspect

the doings of other people. However, to-night I saw you by accident!"

"By accident! How?"

"Before we go further in this most important matter, Monsieur Claude," says de Verney coolly, "we must come to an understanding on one important point."

"What point? I don't understand!"

"Then I'll make it clear to you," returns Maurice calmly but impressively. "To do so, permit me to recall to your mind certain facts concerning you and me. I am Maurice, Le Chevalier de Verney, of noble family and plenty of money, but wanting *fame!* Seven years ago, at twenty, I was lieutenant of chasseurs, stationed in Algeria, and had nothing to do but shoot lions to gain fame. I gained all the fame possible by killing the king of beasts." Here he fondles carelessly the lion's head by which he is sitting. "Then I volunteered for service in Mexico, and fought my way to a medal and a captaincy. Well, you know the end in Mexico. I came home, unharmed, with a little more fame and one year's leave. A year of inactivity meant a year out of my life. I determined to study the social and political complications of Paris—knowledge is always useful. In my investigations I stumbled on something that astonished me. I unraveled the something which astonished me, and found it was a plot that was being slowly perfected to assassinate the Emperor. I saved His Majesty's life. You remember that day's ride in the Bois de Boulogne, when I warned Louis Napoleon not to let the man riding behind him overtake him or he was a dead man. You remember the plot that had been perfected under your very eyes, and you had not seen it, *Monsieur le Préfet de Sûreté.* You remember the '*affaire Koelch*'! *Sapristi!* you ought to remember it. It nearly cost you your official head!"

"*Diable!* Don't speak of it!" mutters Monsieur Claude with a shiver, though the room is very warm.

"That service made the Emperor my friend, gave me the cross of the Legion of Honor, promotion to the grade of commandant, and the position of extra aide-de-camp to the general commanding the troops in Paris. A little more glory! Then you were instructed, Monsieur Claude, to place any affair of vital importance that you could not understand in my hands for investigation.

Since that time—it is almost two years now—you have had several affairs of vital importance that you did not understand: *vide* the attempt, eight months ago, to assassinate the Czar of Russia when he came here to the Exposition—and you never came near me. You are jealous of me, Monsieur Policeman, and now"—here he laughs in Claude's face—"you are at your wits' end. Your official head is already dangling over the fatal basket. You know that something must be done very soon, and you come here to me to wake me up at seven o'clock in the morning to beg me to save you. Is it not so, Monsieur Claude?"

The young man looks smilingly at the head of police, who almost groans to him "Y-e-s!"

"Well, I'll save you, but you must sign this paper. It is already written." And, in dazed wonder, the policeman sees the aristocrat unlock an ornamental desk, and produce the following:

"PARIS, April 21st, 1868.

"I hereby place the Affaire _____ wholly in the hands of Maurice, Le Chevalier de Verney, Commandant 10th Chasseurs d'Afrique, for both investigation and action."

As he reads, the eyes of the chief of secret police look sharply at Maurice. He grins, and remarks: "Smart as you are, you don't know to what this affair relates!"

"Don't I? But I know too much to tell you any more till you sign that document. Place your name on that paper, and I'll fill in the blank. If you don't—good-morning!"

Monsieur de Verney walks to the door to bid his visitor good-by. Before he gets there, the head of police signs the paper, and says, "Now fill it up, and I'll see how much you know, my amateur policeman."

"Certainly!" and Maurice writes hurriedly ten words that make the eyes of Monsieur Claude roll in his head, for the document now reads:

"PARIS, April 21st, 1868.

"I hereby place the Affaire Hermann—concerning the assassination or kidnapping of the Prince Imperial—wholly in the hands of Maurice, Le Chevalier de Verney, Commandant 10th Chasseurs d'Afrique, for both investigation and action.

"CLAUDE,
"Chef Department de Sûreté."

"Now," remarks Maurice, pocketing the paper, "I want the grade of colonel and the Grand Cross for this affair; fortunately for the pocket of France I am not mercenary." With that he places the paper in security, nonchalantly lights a cigar, and murmurs, "Time is precious. Your story?"

"At once!" is the reply, and Monsieur Claude, who, though he has been forced by despair to place this matter in the hands of this man of whom he is desperately jealous, and has been dazed by astonishment even at the slight revelations this interview has already brought him, now pulls himself together, becomes all over policeman again, and tells his news shortly and concisely, sometimes consulting a note-book to be sure of his data.

"Three days ago, that is, last Saturday, April 18th, I received information from the Prussian foreign office that there was some plot against the safety of the Prince Imperial that would shortly develop itself in Paris. Imagine my excitement at this meager news! I telegraphed for more. All they could tell me in reply was that a man, of supposed socialistic tendencies, had left Berlin for Paris on last Thursday, the 16th. He was known in Berlin as Hermann Schultz, was a native of Alsace, by occupation a pharmaceutical chemist, about 30 years of age, light complexion, medium height—had been heard to threaten violence to the Emperor of the French—his father had been killed at a barricade in Paris in '48. The reason the Prussian police suspected him of being connected with a plot against the Prince Imperial was a scrap of paper carelessly left in his room and found after his departure."

"You telegraphed for the paper?" asks Maurice earnestly.

"At once! and the reply was that the policeman had thoughtlessly destroyed it. Oh! those Germans! those imbecile Germans! that fool Bismarck!" cries Monsieur Claude with true Gallic contempt.

"Probably Monsieur Bismarck (if he knows anything about this matter) has some reason for keeping the scrap of paper to himself—there may be more things on it than he wishes us to see. These Prussians are not such fools as we Frenchmen think them. Perhaps some day you may find that out—but continue, Monsieur Claude—you,

of course, began a search for this man Hermann ?" remarks de Verney.

"Of course I did—I am not a fool if Bismarck is," returns Claude snappishly. "But the information had come on the 18th, and the man arrived on the 17th. He had been in Paris one day. It took my emissaries four hours to find him—the description being indefinite and the subject of investigation having another name. He is now Hermann Margo."

"Yes, I mentioned that when you came in," interjects Maurice.

"Well, this Hermann Margo, or Schultz, whatever his name is, was found—and watched !"

"What did he do ?"

"Of course, we don't know what he did for the one day and four hours before we found him—since then he has done nothing !"

"*Nothing ?*"

"NOTHING ! That's what makes me so suspicious about him."

"Nothing ! A man in Paris for four days and do nothing ?" Maurice's eyebrows rise in a smile.

"That is, nothing to speak of. He has eaten, slept and walked about."

"Spoken to no one ?"

"No one—except to order his meals, bargain for his rooms, and curse the boy who blacked his boots."

"Nothing else ?"

"Oh ! ah ! yes ; he has each day bought a flower for his button-hole."

"What kind of a flower ?"

"The officers apparently did not note that," mutters Monsieur Claude, looking over his memoranda.

"From whom did he purchase them ?"

"Officers did not ascertain that—probably unimportant."

"Ah !"

This is an unmistakable sneer. At which Monsieur Claude reddens and mutters hurriedly, "But he wrote in his room a large part of each day."

"What ?"

"A treatise on chemistry."

"*Mon Dieu !*" exclaims Maurice in astonishment ; then

asks after a moment, "Have you any of the treatise with you?"

"No, but a copy of it has been taken, of which, of course, he knows nothing; but I have had the manuscript examined by a chemist, and he says it appears to be orthodox—that is, to be scientifically correct and have the usual meaning. This Hermann has also fitted up a little laboratory and made experiments."

"Well—I shall want that treatise," remarks Maurice. "You discovered all this I presume when you searched his room?"

"Certainly! As soon as he left it in the morning, we entered it, and there was not a piece of furniture in it unexamined."

"Still, you may have missed something!"

"Impossible! We even opened and searched the pillows and the mattress——"

"Bed-posts, rugs; tore up the flooring and looked into the lining of the clothes he left in his apartment; the usual routine search"—interrupts Maurice—"and found nothing."

"Nothing! But, if it had been in the old days, I'd have had him! Oh, for the good old days when you could arrest a man for nothing!" mutters the chief of police with a sigh.

"Ah, yes!—but now you dare not act without some evidence. Monsieur Rochefort and his reds are making such a row about illegal arrests."

"Yes, orders from the Tuileries are, 'No seizures without proofs.' Oh! for the dear old days of '53, and I'd have had Monsieur Schultz on his way to Cayenne before this," mutters the head of police, sadly shaking his head. Then he continues rapidly: "Not being able to discover anything compromising in his apartments, I concluded they must be on his person. We knew he had a pocket-book and papers that he always carried with him—I dared not arrest and search him—I concluded that he should be seized, robbed, and searched by footpads. He was returning home this morning from Le Mabille at half past two——"

"And at the corner of the Rue de Maubeuge and the Rue de Faubourg Montmartre I came upon you and three of your officers engaged in your work. *Parbleu!* You

were handling him as if you intended murder—not robbery," and Maurice gives a slight laugh.

"Yes, we wished him to be sure it was a criminal attempt," murmurs Claude with a smile.

"But did your work very badly. Your poor victim cried, 'Robbers! Aid! Police!' and not a single *sergeant de ville* came to his aid; then he shrieked, as if to wake the dead, 'Police! Murder! Assassins!' and the police still slumbered; but at last, despair giving him wit, he howled, '*Vive La Republique! A bas les Tyrans!*' and in a second, as if by magic, the street was full of gendarmes as far as le Rue de La Fayette. Egad! how you and your detectives ran away from the other policemen!"

"Yes, we had to. We have orders by no means to excite the people. Curse that Rochefort!" cries Monsieur Claude. "It is we who do the skulking now—the criminals strut about like fighting-cocks."

"By running away you managed the affair badly. You should have immediately arrested Monsieur Schultz for seditious cries, hurried him to a police station, searched him and found the pocket-book and papers," remarks Maurice.

"Yes, that might be done. We'll attack him again to-night, and, whether Monsieur Schultz tries the same game or not, we'll search him and find his pocket-book and papers."

"Excuse me, that is now impossible. He no longer carries them on his person," murmurs Maurice.

"Ah! He has been warned! He has destroyed them!" cries the chief of police.

"Not at all; for they are now in my possession!"

"Impossible! I'll not believe that!"

"Then believe these!" says Maurice sharply, unlocking an escretoire and extending to Monsieur Claude an old, worn, red-leather pocket-book. "Does this answer the description of your officers? Perhaps you may have seen it at a distance yourself?"

"Y-e-s—it—is—the German's *porte-monnaie*," gasps Monsieur Claude. "But how in the name of Tophet did you get it?"

"Oh, a mere bagatelle! Perceiving the game you gentlemen were playing, and guessing what you wanted, I assisted Monsieur Schultz in his explanations to the

police, obtained his release, walked home with him, became friends with him, and PICKED HIS POCKETS!"

At this the old head of police bursts into a peal of exultant laughter, and, forgetful of his fifty years, dances a *pas-seul* of delight around the furniture of the room.

CHAPTER II.

THE HEART OF THE CONSPIRACY.

THE dance is a short one. Monsieur Claude has not made five ungainly steps before Maurice says suddenly: "Examine this pocket-book and it'll stop your capers. It is empty as the cupboard of a *grisette* after a student's supper."

"Empty?"

"Yes; it contains nothing!"

"Nothing? Impossible! You are concealing something from me. You have removed its contents."

"Not at all. Monsieur Hermann, evidently suspecting something of your plans, removed what was in this pocket-book before I stole it. It was empty as it is now when I got it. Behold!" and de Verney tosses the old red *porte-monnaie* to Claude.

"Then examine its lining—there may be something concealed in that."

"Already done! There was not even a *sou* in it. No money—nothing!"

"Ah! that indicates he was suspicious!"

"Certainly; and it also indicates he made the transfer from this pocket-book in a hurry and probably in the dark. He had not the time to separate what he wished to hide from the other things contained in it, so he made the transfer bodily, most likely just before your officers assaulted him, Monsieur Claude!"

"Then how under heaven did you guess he was engaged in a plot against the Prince Imperial?"

"Do you see these letters?" remarks Maurice impressively, producing a little packet of documents tied with a red string and handing them to the chief of police. "Read them!"

"They are in a woman's handwriting, and in the German language and text," remarks Claude, after running through the epistles, "and apparently from a sister to a brother. But I see nothing peculiar in them."

"No; not very peculiar to you, but wonderfully suspicious to me. I spent an hour over them before I went to bed," replies Maurice, taking the letters again into his possession. "They are three in number, addressed to Berlin, and dated Paris, April 11th, 13th, 15th. Allowing one day for their passage to Berlin, they were received by Hermann Schultz April 12th, 14th, and 16th. Now scan closely these letters; they are all written in German text; but examine more carefully and you see that the writer occasionally, in apparent carelessness, forgetfulness, or ignorance, writes one Latin letter instead of a German letter; *vide* the word , which should be . The *a* is, you see, a Latin *a*, not a Teutonic one. Now, take these Latin letters——"

"And they make words—sentences—sense!" cries Monsieur Claude in triumphant interruption.

"Not by any means," returns de Verney. "We are not dealing with children, but conspirators who are German philosophers—the cipher is much more intricate and ingenious. Each word that contains a Latin letter is intended to be used."

"Yes, but they do not make sense," remarks Claude. "I see only these words with Latin letters in the first epistle: 'MONDAYS—FINE—BETWEEN—THE—D'ACCLIMATATION—OUR—HOLE—GARDENERS.' Bosh! You don't call that sense, do you?"

"By no means. But put these with the words in the other two letters similarly denoted, and place them in the order of their dates, 11th, 13th, and 15th, and we get this," remarks de Verney, handing Monsieur Claude a piece of paper that reads as follows:

"MONDAYS — AND — IN — FINE — OUR — PLAYS — BETWEEN — AND — IN — THE — ACTS — JARDIN — D'ACCLIMATATION — HIDE — SEEK

"OUR — HIDES — A — HOLE — BY — PARK — GARDENERS — A — RECEPTACLE — KNOW — BY — RED — ROSES — ONE — ANSWER

"ON — OF — WORK — GAS — YOU — PROPOSED — IT — SAFEST — ALL — THE — IS — I — SHALL — FAIL

"ADDITIONAL — TO — FOLLOW — EACH — RED — ROSE — BUD — COME — IMMEDIATELY."

"That's gibberish also, remarks Monsieur Claude, throwing down the paper."

"Not all of it," returns Maurice. "The last two lines of the last letter make sense. 'ADDITIONAL TO FOLLOW EACH RED ROSE-BUD. COME IMMEDIATELY.'"

"That letter got there on the 16th, and Hermann left Berlin that same day."

"Oh!" remarks Claude, contemplatively. "But the balance?"

"The balance is the most difficult of all ciphers to read, because it is almost impossible to get the whole of it together. There are other letters sent to other people necessary to complete the sense. Even if the police seized all the epistles addressed to or in the possession of any one conspirator, and guessed the clew, they would not be able to make out its meaning."

"Ah! then there are other letters?"

"Doubtless! And, until we obtain them, it is an impossibility for us to interpret this," says de Verney good-naturedly, "because we have not all of it in our possession. My examinations suggest to me that probably there were two other letters written to Berlin on the 12th and 14th of April; to another man. The two conspirators compared these letters, found they were ordered to come here, and left for Paris on the 16th, as the German police notified you. That would make every alternate word missing, save where the first and fifth words join. Of course, most of the communication I have been unable to decipher, but I have also been able to make a shrewd guess at the reading of the first sen-

tence. Here it is. You will find the words I know in capitals, the alternate words, I guess at, in small letters, and when I am unable to guess, a blank," and he hands the chief of police another paper, which reads :

"MONDAYS *Wednesdays* AND *Saturdays* IN FINE *weather* OUR { *victim* / *object* / *prince* } PLAYS BETWEEN *two* AND *four* IN THE *afternoon* AT *the* JARDIN D'ACCLIMATATION *at* HIDE *and* SEEK."

"That is very wild guessing," remarks Claude sententiously, putting the paper down with a sneering "*Pish!*"

"So wild that I would never have ventured it, had not my perceptions been quickened by a little incident that happened to me yesterday," returns Maurice calmly. "As extra aide-de-camp to the general commanding the troops in Paris, I was compelled to deliver in person a messsage to the Emperor. His majesty received me without ceremony, *en famille.* I had just finished my business when the door opened and the Prince Imperial ran in with a beautiful bunch of roses in his hand, saying proudly. 'Look! She gave them to me!' '*She,*' echoed the Emperor; 'who is she?' 'Oh! the beautiful flower-girl—the one I see so often!' replied the Prince. 'Louis is becoming quite a man. He is thirteen, and has already a *petite amourette. Parbleu!* he is like his father,' laughed the Emperor. I approached the young prince and begged to see his bouquet. 'Certainly, Monsieur de Verney,' said the little gentleman. 'It was a compliment to me, she is so beautiful; her eyes are like chocolate stars; she is called the beautiful flower-girl of the Jardin d'Acclimatation.' 'Every one likes my boy,' murmured the Emperor. 'Even the Faubourg Saint Germain,' said I, and bowed myself out."

"And what has this anecdote of inner court life to do with your guessing this cipher?" growls Monsieur Claude, who imagines it is only told him to hurt his feelings and exalt his opinion of Maurice; Monsieur Claude not being received *en famille* by the Emperor.

"Only this," says de Verney coolly. "Attached to the bouquet given the Prince Imperial by the flower-girl of the Jardin d'Acclimatation, was a slip of paper. Upon this paper was written '*Mes hommages.*' It was in

German text, and in the same feminine handwriting that appears in the three cipher letters."

"*Le Diable!*"

"Besides," says Maurice, with a grin, "the Prince told me the girl was very talented, and had invented for them *a new game—hide and seek.*"

"The Empress must be warned at once," mutters Monsieur Claude, after a disappointed sniff of astonishment.

"On the contrary, I shall say nothing to Her Majesty. The thought that her son is in danger would only distress her. The mother in her would overcome the sovereign. She would take such extraordinary precautions that these conspirators would become alarmed and disappear, only to turn up at some unexpected moment to carry out their design. The only sure safety for the Prince is the discovery and punishment of all who are concerned in this plot against him," replies de Verney.

"Oh! *You* will say nothing to the Empress! But *I* shall notify her this morning. If anything happens to that boy it will be my official ruin. I'm too old and wary a bird to be caught with any such logical chaff, my young philosophical dreamer," says Claude with asperity.

"Pardon me, you will say not a word to Her Majesty."

"Pardon *me*, I am now going to notify her immediately," mutters the old man, getting to the door.

"Stay where you are! Don't dare to leave the room!"

"This is extraordinary language to the head of police."

"*You are no more head of police!*"

"WHAT!" This is a yell of astonishment from the Prefect de Sûreté.

"You are my subordinate."

"YOUR SUBORDINATE?"

"Yes. When you signed that document appointing me to the sole charge of the 'Affaire Hermann,' at that moment you became subject to my orders."

"I—do—not—understand." This last is said slowly, in a dazed manner, by the old man.

"This is the reason you are!" remarks Maurice, producing a paper with the imperial seal. "Foreseeing that some such complication as this might happen, two years

ago, I obtained from the Emperor *this* : Read it ! " and, placing the document under Claude's eyes, that gentleman sees :

" In case any criminal investigation is placed in the hands of Maurice, Le Chevalier de Verney for action, he shall have full and complete control of the Bureau de Sûreté for that investigation. Given at the Tuileries, Paris, November 22d, 1866.

" LOUIS NAPOLEON,
" EMPEROR."

..... : Seal : of : France. : .....

" You see, in the ' Affaire Hermann,' you are my subordinate, Mr. Claude," laughs the young man. Then he says sternly, " Not a word of danger to the Prince Imperial —to any one, man or woman ! You will go from here and send to me four of your most expert assistants, one old and experienced, two middle aged, one young, active and very cunning. Let them be here by ten A.M. It is eight now—that will give me an hour for sleep ; another for my toilet and breakfast. Send by them all papers whatsoever bearing on this matter, marked ' Affaire Hermann.' You will also send me a detail of ten of your most trusted officers for special instructions. I shall not warn the Empress, but——"

"You will guard the Prince Imperial?" interjects Monsieur Claude.

" As I would my soul ! "

" You young fashionable gentlemen do not take very good care of your souls," sneers the old head of police.

" Then I'll guard the Prince Imperial as I would my honor ! No one ever dared to insinuate I could not protect that ! " returns de Verney hotly. A moment after he continues quite coldly : " In case there is anything I wish to consult you about, I shall send for you." Here Maurice rings the bell, and, François answering it, he bows and says, " Good morning."

The old head of police walks back to him and whispers in his ear : " Pardon me, but what do you intend to do at ten o'clock ? "

" First," replies Le Chevalier, " search Monsieur Her-

mann's room, to see what there really is in it; second, *to go straight to the heart of this conspiracy.*"

"The heart of this conspiracy? What is that?"

"THE HEART OF THE WOMAN WHO WROTE THOSE LETTERS! I can't get the whole of that cipher, but I will get the whole of the heart of the woman who wrote it! I am young, perhaps good-looking." Here Maurice catches his reflection in the mirror and smiles. "I have plenty of gold and plenty of brass—— My dear Claude, wish me luck. I'm going to make love to the lovely flower-girl of the Jardin d'Acclimatation AND CATCH HER!"

"Two can play at that game," mutters the old thief-taker pointedly. "Beware, she doesn't catch you, my boulevard Adonis!"

But the warning has fallen on empty air. Maurice de Verney has torn off his dressing-gown, plunged into bed, and is already asleep and snoring the snores of an exhausted manhood.

"Will Monsieur have a cup of coffee before he goes?" suggests François.

"No—no coffee—but a glass of brandy!" ejaculates Claude.

And this being given him, he gets down the steps into the quiet Rue d'Hautville, just waking up into the bustle of another day of that gay, dashing, ephemeral Second Empire, and thinks ruefully to himself: "He'll get all the glory of this affair, and curse him! I take all the risk. If anything happens to that imperial brat, I'm a goner!" Then he gazes up at No. 33 *Au Premier*, where he has left Maurice de Verney in bed, and mutters: "Asleep when the fate of the Empire is in your hands! My jack-o'-dandy, my court pet, my woman charmer; are you a mountebank or are you a colossus?"

CHAPTER III.

YOUNG MICROBE OF THE RUE DE JÉRUSALEM.

An hour after this, Le Chevalier de Verney, springing out of bed once more, proceeds to make a toilet rather different from the usual one of gentlemen in his rank in

life ; being more that of an athlete in training for the ring than that of a swell of the boulevards.

First incased in heavy flannels, and muffled in a blanket-overcoat, though it is a rather warm April morning, he runs round his apartments, using not only his bedchamber, but his parlor and library to give length to his course, and taking, in his stride, the articles of furniture that come in his path ; vaulting over arm-chairs and leaping tables, turning, stopping and suddenly changing his direction, as if dodging some imaginary adversary or pursuer ; in a manner to give the greatest quickness, agility and activity to his muscles of locomotion.

After, perhaps, ten minutes of this rapid work, he turns his attention to the exercise of the upper parts of his body, using the Indian clubs for a moment, then the lighter dumb-bells ; while doing this, rapidly running about and jumping with them in his hands, so as to place every individual muscle in action at one moment. All this is done with such incredible rapidity, lightness and grace that François, though he has seen such an exhibition every morning since he has been in Monsieur de Verney's service, cries out, "*Mon Dieu !* Were you not a Hercules, I should call you an antelope ! "

" Perhaps I'm both, François," remarks his master, with French vanity, not even panting from his extraordinary exertions. " Let me see if I'm all right as to power," and he seizes the giant dumb-bell of his collection, a hundred and fifty pounder, and puts it up quite easily, but does so only once, as if for a test.

"*Parbleu !* I believe I'm stronger than ever this morning—now as to my activity. Dodge me, François ! " he cries. And before the Algerian veteran can make two steps, he has run to him, caught him by one arm, and propelled him over his back like the bow does the arrow. The war-trained follower, as he hurtles through the air, sees his young master disappearing into his bath-room, debonairly humming an earthly aria *La* Patti has made divine to him the night before at *Les Italiens*, where she is now having the last of her maiden rule, and singing the last of her virgin songs.

Monsieur de Verney has been thoughtful of both his bric-a-brac and his servant, and the place he has selected

for the landing of François is the soft mattress of his luxurious bed.

Taking a somersault from the force of impact and groveling among the lace-trimmed pillows, Monsieur François looks curiously after his master and mutters to himself, "I never thought but one man in the world could give such a fall. I never saw but one wrestler in Paris use that peculiar throw in such lightning style. Can it be possible that my master is——" He checks himself here, and a moment after says, "Pshaw! Monsieur de Verney has something else to look after than struggling for the applause of a mob and the amorous glances of court beauties from the concealment of their boxes. The chevalier can get them without——"

He is interrupted here by a cry from the bath-room.

"You forgot to put the ice in the shower, François; it is hardly bracing enough." A moment after, de Verney appears, and sweeping the water from his eyes mutters, "The hair towels! Quick!"

"*Mon Dieu!*" thinks the servitor as he rubs his master down. "He's an Apollo!"

In this he is wrong. Maurice de Verney, whose shining skin, rosy with health and exercise, is just tinted by the morning sun that steals in through the lace and silk of his windows, is not an Apollo, but a brawny Hercules concealed in the graceful outlines and quick-moving limbs of a Mercury.

Perhaps he is better described as a physical combination of the two. The tremendous power of the loins, hips and back, the magnificent development of the forearms, all indicate the giant strength of the demi-god who clubbed lions to death and held Atlas up from earth; while the lithe, loose play of the muscles of the whole figure, the graceful ease of movement of the perfectly proportioned hands and feet, give to the whole body the lightness and agility that is pre-eminent in the god of motion.

Looking on him, a man would have exclaimed, "How grand!" a woman would have cried, "How beautiful!"

For any coarseness or brutality or brawniness, suggested by his enormous physical strength, is contradicted by the light, graceful activity of each pose of his body, and entirely destroyed by the intelligence of his beaming

blue eyes and soft, passionate mouth, that would have made the face they gazed on almost effeminate, had these not been dominated by a grand forehead and massive lower jaws, that gave determination as well as fortitude and courage to this man's face.

This face, however, is deeply thoughtful. Maurice de Verney is just pondering whether he has been entirely wise in his interview of two hours ago with the head of police. "I should have treated him with more courtesy," he thinks. "Youth should appear to respect age, even when it despises it. Monsieur Claude may, if he dares and is vindictive, place some nasty obstacles in the way of my investigation." A moment after he mutters to himself, "Oh ! but it did me good to show him I resented his two years' jealousy." With this he turns to his valet, and asks suddenly: "What did Monsieur Claude do on leaving my room, this morning?"

"He asked for brandy," answers François, sententiously.

"And drank it ?"

"As if it were water ! Then either that overcame him or something else, for he seemed almost to stagger down the stairs."

"He must have been hit pretty hard," smiles Maurice, and with the smile dismisses Monsieur Claude from his mind, and runs over his various plans of action for the day.

While he is thinking, he is dressing, and at 9.45 A. M. steps into his dining-room in the light morning dress of a dandy of the Second Empire. Embellished by the finest of linen, the daintiest, lightest and loosest of silk cravats, and the freshest of rose-buds, Maurice de Verney has more the appearance of a boulevard butterfly than that of a man beginning one of those games of chance where victory is life-long triumph, and defeat the loss of even another chance to try again. "Egad !" he thinks, "if anything happens to that 'hope-of-the-empire' now, I'd better turn Republican; there'll be no hope for me under Napoleon."

However, he sits down to his rolls, eggs, and coffee, and has a good appetite, for he suddenly orders François, "Have a steak *à la Américain* cooked. I shall have no time for anything till dinner, and starvation sharpens the intellect for the pursuit of provisions, not criminals."

He has hardly finished his steak when François comes in to him with a very serious face and says: "There are four gentlemen in the parlor who wish to speak to you. They look as if they were the agents of Monsieur Claude. I was once on duty for a year at the Prefecture of Police, and know the look of these gentry. You are not in trouble, Monsieur de Verney?" And the old military servant gazes at his young master with a good deal of love in his sturdy countenance.

Standing as he does with military erectness, François Le Brun, his hair slightly grizzled, his face still tinged with the tan of an African sun, his forehead and chin wearing the honorable scars of Arab sword-cuts, his eyes piercing, his mouth firm, save where the under lip trembles with anxiety for the young man he loves, the old French soldier looks like a veteran of the First Republic, one of those that made the once lost field of Marengo a final triumph, and the impossible bridge of Arcola a military possibility.

Noting his concern, de Verney remarks: "There is no danger to me, François, *if I succeed.* Perhaps it is my duty to you to tell you that I am about engaging in an enterprise of the greatest importance to France. That what I require from you are two things you have always given me—obedience and silence."

"And also *love!*" mutters the old servant.

But his master does not apparently hear this, as he says suddenly: "Send those gentlemen in to me. Time is precious, and I can eat and talk also."

François salutes, and a moment after shows in four very peculiar looking gentlemen.

They introduce themselves by the names of Alphonse Jolly, Henri Marcillac, Victor Regnier, and Ravel Microbe. Messieurs Marcillac and Jolly are staid veterans of the Rue de Jérusalem. They have been spies upon Republicans during Royalty in France, informers upon Imperialists during the brief Republic, and now are having an eye upon Monsieur Rochefort and his reds; for they are simply detective policemen, and have only the polities of those who employ them; *i.e.*, the party in power. Jolly can remember as far back as the time of Vidocq, and is very proud of having made his *début* on the police under that celebrated old galley-slave and thief-taker.

These two have been already employed watching the actions of Monsieur Hermann Margo, the suspect; they tell precisely the same story as to his actions as Monsieur Claude. Since they have found him in Paris, he has done nothing, spoken to no one on the streets, and when they searched his room they found only the manuscript of a chemical treatise which he evidently was writing. "He has fixed habits," remarks Jolly. "He always takes his exercise between ten and twelve in the forenoon."

"Always? Where does he walk?" queries Maurice.

"On the main boulevard. His beat is as regular as a *sergeant de ville's*, from Montmartre to the Rue Royale; on the right hand side going west, and the opposite one returning."

"He makes that promenade each day?"

"Invariably."

"Never goes any further?"

"Never! Did he not from his actions seem to know Paris, I should have thought he was afraid of getting lost," laughs Marcillac.

"He does not speak to a soul?"

"Not a human being. Even buys his rose-bud each day silently. Simply lays down a ten *sous* piece and picks up a *boutonnière*."

"From a flower-girl?" says Maurice quickly.

"No. Always at the kiosk opposite the *Variétés*. It is the nearest one to the commencement of his promenade."

"That's all you know?"

"Everything!"

"Then," orders Maurice, "you two gentlemen will proceed at once to Monsieur Hermann's lodgings, No. 55 Rue de Maubeuge. He is hardly more than awake by this time, as I left him at three o'clock this morning."

At this astounding statement to the four detectives, they gaze at each other. De Verney, however, makes no comment, and continues, "You will note every movement of his or any visitors he may have. In case he goes out, you, Jolly, will follow his promenade, and you, Marcillac, will still watch his lodgings, but send a messenger immediately to me, notifying me of his absence. You had better go at once."

The two take their leave, Maurice remarking to them

en passant, "I presume you are good friends with *la concierge?*"

"Ain't we," returns Jolly, with a solemn grin. "The old woman who keeps Hermann's lodgings was once Rose Passeul of the Odeon, in '45. I was a wild boy then. Eh! Marcillac?" and he gives a sexagenarian nudge to his companion as they exit.

After a moment's contemplation upon Monsieur Hermann's regularity of promenade, and invariable purchase of rose-buds, de Verney turns to the other two *Agents de Sûreté*. They are in great contrast to the men who have left, and much younger, Regnier being scarcely forty, and Microbe hardly over twenty-five years of age.

Regnier is a stern-looking man, whose grin is even savage, but he has an appearance of firmness that would lead one to trust him on all occasions, even where it cost him much to be faithful. He is laconic in speech, and carefully though not expensively dressed, while Jolly and Marcillac are probably niggardly in their habits; their clothes being apparently second-hand suits purchased in some slop shop of the Faubourg St. Antoine, and then worn to a second old age, that is more ragged, greasy and disreputable than their first one.

In bright contrast to even the respectability of Regnier is the radiant young Microbe.

This *élève* of the Rue de Jérusalem, whose father was a thief-taker before him, and who has, as it were, grown up in the business, is gorgeous in the resplendent attire of a *petit crévé*, that shows he would like to rival Duval *le jeune* in magnificent raiment; were the detective business rolling in millions like selling soup at ten *centimes* a plate to Parisian *bourgeois*.

To these two Maurice briefly explains the business in which he wishes their aid, telling them a good deal about Monsieur Hermann, but nothing about the flower-girl of the Jardin d'Acclimatation or the Prince Imperial. Now he says, "Monsieur Regnier, what do you think?"

"I never think," replies that laconic officer; "when I am a subordinate, I do what I am told, and let my superior do the thinking."

"Very well, in that case you will go immediately to the flower kiosk opposite the *Variétés*. Stay there until relieved, and report to me who keeps the place, and if

anything whatsoever happens unusual or striking in the business of the stand; also, if any person calls more than once; their appearance and what they say or do!" remarks Maurice.

"As you order!" says Regnier, and with that and a bow leaves the apartment.

Then the chevalier turns to Microbe with a smile and suggests, "What do you think?"

"I think Regnier is an infernal fool!" ejaculates the dandy policeman, whom Maurice can see has for the last few minutes been nervous to get in his word. "He couldn't make head nor tail of the matter, so he resorted to his laconics; old detectives are like old doctors, and in dubious cases prefer to say nothing and look wise. Now I like to say what I think, and I think this Hermann Margo, or Schultz, takes his walk every day between ten and twelve o'clock on his beaten track because he expects some day to meet the man with the other half of those cipher letters—then they will compare them, read the cipher and destroy them. *That is the reason he still has or had his letters and still takes his walks.*"

"And young detectives are very like young doctors," rejoins Maurice. "But I entirely agree with you, Monsieur Microbe. However, we'll test this to-day. In case our supposition is right, the man Hermann not having his letters will not take his walk, or will vary or modify it in some way. Do you think the rose-buds he buys at the kiosk have any bearing on the matter?"

"Probably!" remarks Microbe after contemplatively whistling a bar or two of Offenbach's *Orpheus*. "But before I speak definitely, I'd like to know a little more about the kiosk and its salespeople!"

"I see young detectives are not *always* like young doctors!" laughs Maurice. "They have sometimes doubts in regard to their diagnosis. However, you're about the man I'm looking for—you have youth, activity, wit, and, at times, prudence. The affair in which I need your aid is of such a peculiar nature and concerns so exalted a personage that I shall not tell you all in this matter—at least, not at present."

"That is as monsieur pleases," replies young Microbe, "but, if I don't know all you know, don't expect my guessing to be as sharp as yours is."

"I must take that chance," returns de Verney—then after a pause he asks a question, "Do you know, or have you seen in your wanderings about Paris (for from the cut of your coat I should imagine you see most of the sights of the city), a pretty flower-girl who often sells children flowers at the Jardin d'Acclimatation?"

The answer he gets astonishes him. "What! Louise!" calmly remarks Ravel, stroking his imperial superciliously; "I should rather—think—I—do! She's the most fetching thing in the female flower line that's been seen in Paris since Isabel, who used to be the pet of the Jockey Club and sell those aristocrats of the turf posies at a *napoleon* apiece. In a month she'll be more popular than ever Isabel was. Louise is knowing; she plays her cards like a *croupier* at Baden-Baden. She's mashed the Prince Imperial, and that little potentate comes three times a week to the Jardin, or the Bois just at the gates of it, sulks when he doesn't see her, and will buy flowers for his playmates from no other hands!"

This revelation gives a shiver to Maurice who fears his assistant may be so much in love with Louise that he may not only be useless but dangerous to him. After turning this over in his mind, he is delighted he has told Microbe no more than he has, and asks carelessly, "You know this Louise very well then?"

The answer that comes relieves him.

"Unfortunately I don't," says Ravel, with a French shrug of his shoulders. "I have tried to know Mademoiselle, and I think she knows me; for, the other day, I gave her one of my Quartier-Latin glances, and she gave me in return the scowl of a fiend—and that after I had paid a *franc* to the extortionate little witch for a rose not worth two *sous*."

"Is she so small—you always call her *petite*?" asks Maurice.

"No, but she's so deuced pretty. I always call pretty women *petite*, don't you?" mutters Ravel. "However, I'll have a try at an acquaintance again before I've done with a *petite* [illegible]." As he says this last, Microbe's eyes sparkle with anticipated triumph, he passes his hand through his hair, pulls his cravat into place, and utters complacently, "Few of them resist me long."

"No, I should judge not," echoes Maurice. "But

you must forego your triumph over Louise, at least for the present. For the purposes of this business, I wish to make her acquaintance myself."

"Wh-e-u-gh!" This is a very prolonged and very knowing whistle from Ravel Microbe.

"For the purposes of this business," continues Maurice sternly, "and for no other! I wish to become acquainted with her under circumstances that will open the way to an easy continuance. Perhaps, I had better be thought by her rather a hero. Now, you must give me that opportunity, Monsieur Microbe!"

"I!—How?"

"By appearing to insult her. You must wait until the girl leaves the 'Bois' on her way home and gets into one of the quieter streets. By-the-bye, do you know where the young lady lives?"

"Not exactly, but it's somewhere in the direction of Passy."

"Out in that suburb she's pretty certain to get into some street where there are few people. Then you must approach her, and—but I had better give you your instructions in writing, so that there can be no mistake!" Maurice writes down a dozen lines on paper, and, after careful consideration, signs the document, hands it to Microbe, and says, "Follow this implicitly."

After looking over his instructions, young Microbe gives a yell of laughter and cries: "This is a comedy!"

"No!" replies de Verney sternly. "Unless we do our duty very sharply, it is a tragedy that will shake the world!"

"Very well," returns his assistant rather demurely. "I'll put on my Mabille suit, and do your bidding." Then he says suddenly: "And if we succeed in this great matter, Monsieur de Verney, what am I to get?"

"My ruby ring, that you have been looking at so attentively, and admiring for the last ten minutes—and the reward that a detective gets when he has done something that astonishes the Emperor."

But here Microbe astonishes him, for he gets up suddenly and carefully inspects the ruby ring.

"The first part of your reward is definite, Monsieur le Chevalier," he remarks, "and I always like to know the value of my property, for that ruby ring is now mine.

By George! it's worth two hundred louis." This last in a tone of joy.

"Ah! you have the confidence of youth," laughs Maurice.

"Yes; and the activity of one, also," returns Microbe. "This comedy, or tragedy, as you describe it, shall be played to the letter, Monsieur de Verney. *Au revoir*, till we meet before the flower-girl of the Jardin d'Acclimatation." And with a grin this pupil of the Rue de Jérusalem vanishes.

"I wonder if I can trust him," meditates his director. "I must trust somebody; and better youth, wit, activity, even with rashness, than old age, stupidity, and ancient rule of thumb."

CHAPTER IV.

NUMBER 55 RUE DE MAUBEUGE.

At this moment François whispers in his ear, "There are some more of the same kind in the *salon;* they dropped in by one's and two's quietly while you were talking to the first four."

"What time is it?"

"A little after ten."

"Then I haven't a moment to lose," and Maurice de Verney steps into his parlor, where he quietly gives, to the men he meets there, the most minute instructions regarding their watch over the Prince Imperial from the moment he leaves the Tuileries to visit the Bois de Boulogne, until he returns to the safety of the palace and its military guards.

These instructions have been very carefully thought out, and are delivered in writing with the utmost circumspection.

As the *Officiers de Sûreté* depart, Maurice gives a sigh of relief. Now, in case the Prince goes to the Jardin d'Acclimatation, he'll be well taken care of. Though Tuesday is not one of his regular days for visiting the Bois, there is no certainty that this petted young gentleman may not get permission and drive to the Jardin d'Acclimatation at any time.

His mind released to a certain extent from this care, the chevalier is ready to turn his immediate attention to the chemist with the cipher letters.

Of each of these he makes an accurate and very careful copy, which he locks up ; then re-ties the originals with the little red ribbon that was on them, and places the package in his pocket.

He has hardly finished this when a messenger comes from Monsieur Marcillac, stating that the man Hermann has left his rooms for his morning walk, that Monsieur Jolly has strolled after him, and he has, as ordered, notified Monsieur de Verney that the man Hermann's rooms are now empty.

At this, Maurice instantly puts on his hat and departs for the Rue de Maubeuge, scarce noting in his hurry that the day is almost a perfect one, and Paris is apparently coming out to enjoy it, the streets being already full of people. He walks rapidly up the Rue d'Hautville to the Place de La Fayette, then, passing the church of St. Vincent de Paul on his right, he turns into the Rue de Belzunce, and is at 55 Rue de Maubeuge within ten minutes after he has received the report.

Here he is immediately joined by Marcillac, who has been spending his time seated near the window of an opposite wine-shop. This gentleman tells him that, since the man Hermann left twenty minutes ago, followed by Monsieur Jolly, no one has visited No. 55.

"What direction did Hermann take?" asks Maurice hurriedly.

"The usual one—towards the main boulevards—the one he has taken since we have supervised his movements!" remarks Marcillac, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Was there anything unusual in his appearance?"

"No, I think not."

This is disappointing. Maurice had expected that the loss of the letters would have changed the man Hermann's movements in some way. Not having his half of the cipher, he would not try to meet the man with the other half.

"I think he walked a little faster than usual," continues Marcillac, evidently anxious to display his powers of observation.

"Very well," replies de Verney. "If all is ready, I

would like to look at Monsieur Hermann's apartments —*la concierge* understands?"

"Everything!" replies Marcillac. "She has the key of the room ready for us now. Ah, here it is!" For, while speaking, the two have crossed the street and stand at the window of madame, *la concierge*, who is looking at them with a relic of the old-time Odeon grin on her face, and the key in readiness for Monsieur Marcillac.

"Show me his rooms," whispers Maurice, and they ascend to the third floor where the man Hermann has three small apartments at the back of the house.

Then, the door being unlocked, he goes in, saying: "Marcillac, please step down stairs and return the key to the old woman; this is a spring lock, and when I shut the door it will lock itself. In case of Hermann's sudden return, let *la concierge* give him the key without a word; I'll trust to my wits to pass him in the darkness of the stairs. After giving the woman the key, do you go out into the street and prevent Hermann's surprising me here examining his effects." The officer turns to go, when de Verney suddenly asks, "Had you any signal when you searched his room before?"

"Yes sir. You see that line hanging carelessly from the roof of this house past these windows, and descending to the yard?"

"Certainly," replies Maurice, for they have now entered the room, though they have been careful neither to touch nor disarrange anything in it.

"Well, I go into the yard and swing the line twice against the window?"

"That will be all I need. Now you had better get on the look-out as quickly as possible."

"All right, sir." With this the old detective officer leaves the young volunteer in possession of the apartments, and, taking the key, his steps can be heard upon the creaking stairs.

Maurice instantly closes the door opening on to the passage-way, then gazes about him, and a moment after mutters to himself: "Cursed if this isn't the meanest business I was ever in; searching for this poor devil's secrets like a burglar or a sneak-thief. I'm hanged if I don't feel like one now." A moment after, however, philosophy comes to his rescue, and he remarks: "Pish!

Conspirators must be fought with their own weapons," and begins the examination of the rooms.

These consist of a little parlor, a smaller bed-room off it—the two occupying the whole back of the house upon that floor. Behind the parlor, however, is a smaller room, unlighted, save by artificial light, which, though scarcely more than a large closet, has apparently been fitted up as a chemical laboratory. The furniture of all these rooms is of the plainest, the tables and chairs being of painted pine. The bed in the next room, which Maurice can see from the place at which he stands, is without ornament, and its linen pillows, blankets, and coverlet by no means of the finest, though clean enough. The parlor is lighted by two windows, and the bed-room by one. These look out upon an old-fashioned court-yard, quite small, but still capable of containing an immense amount of French filth. This place has almost reached its storage capacity for rubbish, in the form of old bottles, rags, and *bric-à-brac* of the street, collected, no doubt, for sale to the traveling *chiffonnier*. Any one jumping out of the window would assuredly be cut nearly in pieces by the bottles he would fall upon.

"In case I am surprised here, I have no means of exit save the regulation door and stairs," thinks the chevalier, as he surveys this, and inspects the windows opposite, to be sure that no one is watching his search from across the court-yard.

This apparently being not the case, de Verney turns to the main portion of his labor. He carefully inspects the rooms as to any dust or dirt there may be in them ; first, to discover if, by some disturbed dust, some unused portion of the room has been employed for the concealment of any object ; second, to be sure that he will leave no tracks of hands or feet about the apartments to betray his having been there, to their occupant upon his return.

This examination he soon finds a useless labor. Glancing at the impromptu laboratory, Maurice says suddenly : "Pshaw ! The idea of looking for dust in a chemist's rooms. A few particles in one of his experiments would spoil his investigation. A chemist hates dust from force of science !"

This is apparently true in this case. The apartments

are models of cleanliness, though the bed has not yet been made for the day, showing that its owner had evacuated it in a hurry. Two untouched rolls, a pot of coffee, and some butter upon the table in the parlor are an additional proof of Monsieur Hermann's haste this morning.

"If he's in such a hurry to get away, he may be in a hurry to get back," thinks the chevalier, and he proceeds with his work in a hurry also, for he has no thought of Hermann having fled from the room. The man's clothes, overcoat, and some clean collars, just returned from the wash, with a number of articles of personal convenience, all contradict such an idea.

Maurice first examines the bedroom and finds nothing suspicious—the parlor gives him the same result, though he makes the investigation very regularly and thoroughly; even examining the gas-burners for what may be concealed in them. He does this, not by turning on the gas and seeing if it flows freely, which would be the most rapid test; but carefully, by means of a small pair of pincers he finds in the laboratory, unscrews and replaces each burner. The first method might leave a suspicious odor behind it.

He has almost given up hope of any result when, as he turns from the room, chancing to glance into the grate of the open fireplace, not recently used, the weather having been warm, he sees three faded white rose-buds that have been carelessly tossed there.

The man has been in Paris three days, on each day he has purchased or received a white rose-bud—Maurice remembers the last words of the cipher:

"ADDITIONAL TO FOLLOW EACH RED ROSE-BUD."

If his reading of the cipher is correct, Monsieur Hermann has, so far, received no communication since his arrival in Paris.

He carefully examines each faded bud; they are in no way different to those florists usually sell, and he replaces them where he found them.

There is only the laboratory now left. To investigate this he is compelled to light a gas-jet, and is relieved to find this suite of apartments does not have a separate meter. No indication will be given of his having been here by any increased registry of the amount of gas used.

"This increase would be scarcely noticeable, but it's these small things, these minor details, that usually mean success or failure in most people's lives, and I don't like to take chances," meditates Maurice.

All this time he, as rapidly as possible, is inspecting the little laboratory of the German.

There are only the ordinary bottles, beakers, and retorts, together with the usual tubing for handling gases; a large wash-bottle, apparently arranged for the generation of carbonic-acid gas, as it is filled with broken marble, and a couple of good-sized rubber tubes attached to it. These, with a little gas-furnace, a blow-pipe, and a test-tube or two, together with some bottles of apparently harmless drugs, constitute the whole affair.

The laboratory is apparently innocent, but, though having only the general knowledge of physical science that comes with a good military education, Maurice de Verney cannot help reflecting that if Monsieur Hermann is conducting any really intricate investigation or experiment, how inadequate his apparatus is for such work; and muses: "It's all very well to believe that Sir Humphry Davy discovered the principles of the safety-lamp with a few clay pipes and the materials of a small drug-shop in Cornwall; but he was a boy of twelve, could get no better—and was a genius. This man is in Paris, within reach of the conveniences of some of our great laboratories——"

He has time for no further thought; the line in the court-yard is flung violently twice against the window. It is Marcillac's signal!

The man Hermann is returning!

Maurice instantly turns out the gas, steps cautiously into the hall and closes the door behind him, trying it to be sure the spring lock has worked.

He has left every article in the precise condition in which he found it; not even the most observing could suspect it had been visited. He turns away from the door feeling sure that Hermann will have no suspicions.

As he thinks this, however, even his iron nerves give a sudden snap. The man Hermann, coming up in three-stairs-a-jump active bounds, is right upon him. Before he can turn away he will surely be perceived.

Almost by instinct Maurice raises his hand and knocks

upon the door loudly—then, after a moment's pause, repeats the operation, emphasizing it with a slightly vicious kick and cries: "Wake up!"

"Ho!—ah! You wish to see me?" remarks the man Hermann, who has watched these attacks upon his door, at first, perhaps, in a slightly suspicious manner.

"By your voice you're the person I'm looking for," remarks de Verney, turning suddenly towards him. "It's too dark to see you, but the voice is that of last night. I thought you hadn't got up yet."

"Ah! I recognize your voice also now!" returns Hermann. "You're the gentleman who came to my assistance when I was attacked by those cut-throats last night. Your explanation saved me trouble with the police."

"I had two reasons for calling on you this morning," says Maurice. "But, if you'll open the door, I'll be able to see a little better what I'm doing."

"Yes, the light here is only suitable for cats, though they seem to prefer the court-yard by their evening *soirées musicales*," laughs Hermann. "But come in!" With this he unlocks the door and, throwing it open, says, "Sit down and smoke a pipe while I get something to eat. I awoke late, and business compelled breakfast to wait."

"Thanks, I'll light a cigar," murmurs de Verney, declining politely the meerschaum, whose dark color indicates many a smoking-bout in the beer halls of Heidelberg and Freiburg.

"Come, have breakfast with me! I can't give you much—some boiled eggs, rolls, coffee. Eh? Don't say no! I am delighted to see you. I know so few, I speak to no one, I am all alone, and the use of the tongue is as necessary to man as to woman."

"Trite but true!" remarks Maurice, lighting his Havana.

"If you don't believe it, go without friends, companions, small-talk just for three days—that's my limit of experience—and you'll love any woman, or man either, who'll talk to you and listen in return. But you'll have breakfast with me?"

"No, that is impossible; I have already eaten," returns Maurice brusquely. Accepting the hospitality, breaking bread with this man whom he is seeking to

make a criminal, seems so contemptibly treacherous that he is almost impolite in his refusal. He says: "You prepare your breakfast, then I'll tell you what brought me here."

"All right; I'll not keep you waiting long. A chemist can always cook. It's part of the science!"

"I don't understand you!"

"No! then look at me!" With this Hermann opens a drawer, produces two eggs, takes a glass beaker, half fills it with water, lights a gas argand burner, pops the beaker over it and has the water boiling in two minutes. In go the eggs. While they boil, the coffee is heating over the gas-furnace he has lighted between-times; the rolls ditto.

During the time he has been doing this, Maurice has been attentively studying him. Monsieur Hermann is about five feet nine, well-built, florid, blonde, and German in appearance. His blue-gray eyes seem honest, but they have a restless, dissatisfied look, as if searching for something they could never find. He is apparently about thirty-five, has unusual vivacity for a German, and his French but little accent. His hands are white, save where they bear the stains of acids and chemicals, and have that quick, delicate dexterity of movement that constant laboratory manipulation gives.

He would seem happy and contented but for a slight look of anxiety on his face and the seeking glance in his eyes that, at times, becomes intense almost to the point of wildness. Maurice also once catches a peculiar nervous twitching of the lower lip as the German passes the open fire-place, and rather guesses it is caused by some association brought to his mind by the three faded white rose-buds.

The eggs have hardly begun to boil before Hermann turns to his guest and says: "Monsieur de Verney, you were kind enough to give me your name and card last night; will you now be kind enough to tell me why you have taken the trouble to visit me?"

"Certainly. For two reasons. First, I wished to find out whether you felt any bad effects from the attack those garroters made on you last night?"

"Oh, a little stiff in the back, perhaps, and one of my wrists slightly sprained—and your second reason?"

"Was this!" And Maurice hands to the German the little packet of cipher letters.

"Ah! you found them!" This would be a cry of excited joy, were it not forced down by a strong will.

"Yes. Just as I left you last night I picked them up. I should have handed them to you then, but you had already closed your door. So I thought I'd step round this morning and see if they were not yours."

"They are mine, and I'm very much obliged to you," says Hermann rapidly, "very much obliged to you—you have—they are from my sister—and I value them. You Frenchmen only keep your sweethearts' letters; we Germans those of our sisters also."

"Ah! then your sister is not here?"

"No, she was here when she wrote these letters. At present she is away—I—expect to see her in a week—or two." This last is said in some hesitation. "You will excuse me making a quick meal, I must go out again," the young man continues, placing his breakfast, that is now ready, upon the table before him, and falling upon it as if time was now very precious, though he had been in no hurry before he regained the letters.

Noting this, Maurice thinks it best to let him go out, and then see what his actions are.

He rises and remarks, "Now that I have fulfilled my errand, I must also attend to my duties of the day. Good-by!"

"Good-by, my friend!" cries Hermann cordially. "I am again obliged to you; you have permitted me to use my tongue that has been nearly silent since I left Berlin."

"You must have been in Paris before; you speak French very well!"

"Ah! you flatter, but my father was French—my mother German; my name shows that: Hermann Margo."

"Then it is curious that you have no friends in Paris!"

"Not at all; I have never lived here! I came on suddenly from Berlin, I—permit me to be confidential—I am employed on a certain chemical discovery. Sugar, starch and flour are simply charcoal and water in slightly varying proportions. Thus, sugar is C_{12} H_{11} O_{11}" (using the old notation common to that day); "that is, in twenty-three pounds of sugar there are twelve pounds of char-

coal, eleven of water, and *nothing else.* From twenty-three pounds of lump sugar I can make twelve pounds of charcoal and eleven of water. That is easy—but the reverse? Ah ! that is another question. That is what I am trying to discover ; that is what I have nearly found—to make charcoal and water into sugar, starch and flour. There will be plenty of money in that ! Eh ?—Four days ago I discovered in Berlin that a friend of mine, a fellow chemist, was trying to spy out the process I have nearly completed. My best security was in flight ; the next day I was here—safe ! That villain shall never share the profits and honor of my discovery. You will excuse my having said so much, but sometimes my invention excites me. Good-by ! " and he closes his door on Maurice, leaving him rather astonished in the hall. The man's manner has been peculiar and nervous.

Maurice has discovered but little from his visit to No. 55 Rue de Maubeuge, he meditates as he goes down the stairs—only that Hermann Margo was very glad to get his letters back again, and had received so far three white rose-buds.

At the foot of the stairs he is joined by Marcillac, who informs him that Monsieur Jolly, who has followed Hermann home, will make his report in the wine-shop opposite.

To this Maurice crosses, making sure that Margo does not see him, and there encounters the detective who has dogged Hermann's morning walk.

Jolly's words are few and to the point. He followed the suspect to the grand boulevards—there was nothing unusual in his manner—only he walked about twice as fast as he did on other mornings—seemed to be in a great hurry. He turned into the Boulevard Montmartre, went straight to the kiosk opposite the *Variétés,* and bought another rose-bud—laid down his money, and with it a letter which the girl put away on the little shelf behind her.

" She did not open it ? " inquires Maurice hurriedly.

" No, sir. Put it away quite carelessly."

" Very well ; I'll try to get that letter ! " remarks Maurice. " You stay here and follow Hermann——"

He has time to say no more, for Monsieur Jolly, without a word, strolls out of the wine-shop.

Maurice looks after him almost in anger at his abruptness, then gives a start. The man, Hermann Margo, is striding down the Rue de Maubeuge at the top of his speed, and Monsieur Jolly, according to orders, is dodging along after him. A moment after, Hermann crosses the street, and Maurice gets another sensation. The German chemist has left routine behind him, and is now wearing in his buttonhole *a red rose-bud.*

After watching Hermann and the pursuing Jolly pass out of sight, de Verney, leaving Marcillac still on watch at 55 Rue de Maubeuge, walks rapidly home, where he expects by this time some report from Regnier, who has been on observation at the flower kiosk.

In this he is not disappointed. A note has arrived from that officer stating the following facts:

First, the man Hermann left a letter at the kiosk at 10:25, and immediately went away without taking his usual daily promenade.

This is no more than Jolly has already reported; but this additional information from Monsieur Regnier is more interesting:

The letter delivered by Hermann was in a yellow envelope. He (Regnier) had been enabled to be sure of this, for the girl had carelessly placed the note upon a shelf behind her. He had thought of trying to purloin this letter, and, after lounging about indolently for some time, had sauntered up to the kiosk to make the attempt or further observations, as most judicious; but the letter had disappeared, though he is sure that no one bought flowers there during the intervening time, and only the proprietor and a girl of sixteen who minds the stand in his absence were near the place. The proprietor's name is Auguste Lieber; he purchased the business about a month ago, together with the gardens and green-houses near Passy, in which he grows most of the flowers he sells. This man had always been at the kiosk when the German bought his *boutonnière* before. This morning Hermann, apparently in a great hurry, is half an hour before his usual time, and Lieber not present. The rose-bud he bought was a *red one.* On receiving it, he looked troubled and immediately retraced his steps, instead of taking his daily promenade on the boulevards.

"This, of course, accounts for Hermann's unusually

quick return to his lodgings, which nearly disclosed me to him in his apartments," meditates de Verney.

All thought on this subject is here knocked out of his head by young Microbe, who makes an unexpected appearance.

"You are surprised to see me," says that volatile young gentleman. "Only thought I'd do what you told me? In that you wrong me! Monsieur de Verney, you have honored me with your confidence in contrast to the detective machines you have made do machine duty looking after that man Hermann and his gang. I wish to do more than your simple instructions call for. The plot we arranged between us cannot be carried out till three or four this afternoon, therefore I've had some extra time on my hands, and have used it upon this investigation. This information may be of some use to you. I wrote it down, fearing you might not be here."

He hands him a paper, and Maurice reads this model of laconic brevity and accurate statement:

"The girl Louise was never known as a flower-seller till about a month ago. Discovered this by general conversation at cafés, wine-shops, etc.

"Louise lives on the Rue des Vignes, near the Rue de Passy. House and garden have no number. Her full name is Louise M. Tourney. Learned this from Achille Pomard, a barber, who resides near her and tried to flirt with her, but was frightened off by the severeness of her manner and savage glances of her eyes.

"The Prince, although it is not his regular day, visits the Bois de Boulogne this afternoon. Dropped on this by pumping groom in imperial stables, who states that his barouche is ordered for 2 P.M. Consequently the Prince has some companion other than his tutor; when there are only two, they go in a victoria or cabriolet.

"RAVEL MICROBE."

"Have you any further information?" asks Maurice, after perusing the above.

"Yes! As I returned here along the Boulevard des Italiens, I passed Monsieur Jolly. He was following a man I presume to be the Hermann of our investigation. This man wore a red rose-bud. Second. As I passed by the flower kiosk opposite the *Variétés*, I encountered Monsieur Regnier on watch, who gave me this note for you."

He hands Maurice a scrap of paper which reads :

"The man Hermann came back hurriedly at ten minutes past eleven. He went to the kiosk again, said something to the girl, the proprietor having for some reason again left the shop. She shook her head at him. Then he gave her another letter, yellow envelope, and began his usual daily promenade of the boulevards. I can see Monseiur Jolly, as I write, walking after him.

"REGNIER."

These actions of the German are susceptible of but one interpretation by de Verney. Hermann, having lost his cipher letters, could no longer read any additional instructions ; consequently left a note (stating his loss) for some one who could reproduce or replace these letters. Then, having no means of reading anything given to him, omitted his promenade. Having recovered these cipher letters again, he has, as soon as possible, tried to get back his first letter ; and failing in that, has left another notifying the person to whom he sent his first that he has recovered the necessary documents. Next, having regained his means of reading, he is taking his promenade, hoping to receive additional instructions.

Further reflections are cut short by young Microbe's remarking : "If you wish me to perform my part in your drama, I have hardly time to make up and get on the scene. Prompter's bell is ringing orchestra in, curtain will soon go up. It is now after one o'clock."

To this Maurice promptly replies, "Then get to your dressing-room !"

Microbe moves to the door. Here he turns and says, "I am to insult Mademoiselle ?"

"Certainly !"

"I am to kiss her ! Perhaps Louise will not consider that an insult ?" returns the dandy detective, with a self-approving grin.

"You are only to pretend to kiss her," says Maurice suddenly and perhaps sternly. For this jumping-jack-of-the-boulevards' grimaces annoy him—the affair is so serious.

"Ah ! only to *pretend* to kiss her. What a cruel disappointment for a young girl ! What a wound to her vanity ! I look very handsome in my Mabille suit. Louise will certainly consider that an awful insult. Your game is sure, Monsieur de Verney. She will love you when you

beat me." And Microbe's laugh can be heard as he skips down the stairs.

Maurice laughs also, but in a less hearty tone, at this conceit of his assistant. Then he mutters, "I must leave this Hermann matter to 'Regnier, Jolly & Co.' till to-night. I wonder if I can win this game by hearts. I'll have to play my cards quickly, whatever they are." With this he steps into his chamber, rings and orders his phaeton at the door in half an hour; then proceeds to achieve one of those tremendous toilets the beaus of the boulevards in those days were guilty of.

Looking at himself in the glass, he wonders if he has not a little overdone his work. "All the same," he remarks, "I look useless enough to please most women. I wonder if I shall be attractive enough to conquer this one. According to Microbe, she does not look with favor on *petites crévés*. Will a swell *à la Rue St. Honoré* please mademoiselle better?"

A moment after, his equipage is announced by François. He steps down into the quiet Rue d'Hautville where it is waiting for him.

Perfect in the style of that time, it would nearly resemble a mail phaeton of to-day. It is drawn by a dashing pair of chestnuts, a little too spirited, perhaps, for any but a first-rate whip to drive, but a perfect match as to color, style, action and speed. He steps in, the tiny groom leaves the heads of the horses and takes a flying leap to his rumble behind, and Maurice de Verney that bright spring day drives, almost laughingly, away to the Bois de Boulogne to meet—HIS MEPHISTOPHELES IN PETTICOATS.

CHAPTER V.

HIDE AND SEEK.

MAURICE'S chestnuts bowl him along the main boulevards. Here the tremendous traffic of the great city keeps him engaged in guiding his team through the mass of vehicles and pedestrians with which the streets are crowded.

In the Montmartre he manages, however, to catch a

glimpse of Monsieur Regnier, and sees that faithful officer at his post near the flower kiosk. Of Hermann and his shadowing Jolly he sees nothing, and so, after passing through the Rue Royale, comes to the Champs Elysées, that long avenue of matchless pavement, brightened by green trees and beautiful parterres of flowers, which begins gloriously at the Place de la Concorde and ends triumphantly at the Arc de Triomphe.

From this can be seen many of the new boulevards and avenues, outlined by those magnificent detached hotels of that young quarter of the city, exemplifying the fresh life and beauty of the new Paris just made from the ugly old town of monarchical France, whose narrow and winding streets have become broad and straight boulevards, whose foul-smelling gutters have been replaced by under-ground sewerage, and whose mediæval filth, discomfort and plague have been changed to modern cleanliness, convenience and health. For Baron Haussmann has just waved that modern magician's wand, capital and labor, and transformed the most unsightly, pestilentious, and disreputable town of the old *régime* into the most beautiful, airy, and comfortable city of the modern world—the Paris that men travel half round the earth to see, that women dream about, and angels sigh over!

The scene before him is bright with the glory of a Paris April sun. The Champs Elysées is that of 1868—the foot-paths are crowded with workingmen and naughty *grisettes*, who sometimes look enviously at the crowded drive, made more naughty by Mesdemoiselles Seraphin de Jockey Club, of the Rue de Helder, and Cora Rubie, of the Quartier Brèda, whose turn-outs, in grooms, liveries, and horse-flesh, put to shame Madame la Maréchale Sebastopol's, of the Rue St. Honoré, and La Princesse de Fleur-de-lis, of the Faubourg St. Germain.

All this gay, happy, noisy, and very Frenchy scene is unnoticed by de Verney, he is so engrossed by his thoughts.

He swings his team into the Avenue de l'Impératrice, now called that of the Bois de Boulogne, passing a victoria which contains two ladies.

One of them suddenly says: "Who is she?"

The other replies: "What do you mean?"

"Why, the woman that occupies Le Chevalier de Ver-

ney's brain to the exclusion of everything else this afternoon. He did not return my bow!" mutters La Comtesse de Merrincourt with a little *moue.*

"Oh, Maurice has ambitions," laughs her friend La Baronne de Brissac.

"All the same, he is very handsome, and I hope he'll come to Madame de Cavagnac's soirée this evening. I am going to appear in her tableaux. I shall be Venus in the 'Judgment of Paris!' and I think I could drive ambition out of his handsome head!"

"Ah! I presume your costume will be nothing, if not enchanting!" giggles Madame la Baronne.

"It will be *both!*" returns Sophie de Merrincourt, proudly, for she is one of the great beauties of the day. Then, after a pause, she mutters, "If *he* were only Paris; he would be almost as beautiful as the masked wrestler."

"Oh! *L'homme masqué.* Is he not magnificent?"

"What limbs! What physique!" cries the other.

"Ah! you too admire that sybarite of the arena!"

"Enough to give my head to know who he is!"

And the two ladies pass on their way, wildly discussing the most unique sensation of that ephemeral epoch.

Maurice by this time has reached the Bois de Boulogne. The Park is beautiful this day, with green trees and grasses, and wild-flowers just beginning to bloom. The crowd here is not so great, as Le Chevalier, entering at the Porte Dauphin, leaves the popular drive to the Lakes to his left, and makes straight for the entrance to the Jardin d'Acclimatation, near the Sablons gate.

Here he finds the crowd greater again, and more juvenile. Boy and girl aristocrats are being deposited from their equipages; boy and girl *bourgeois* are coming on foot from the railway station at Maillot and the horse-cars; or more directly by omnibuses, to see the animals of this French Zoo.

They make the scene wonderfully bright and brilliant. Silks and laces are on the girls; velvets and laces on the boys—for they are French children and don't spoil their clothes like English ones; and, in their play, don't make one-half the noise of Anglo-Saxon childhood; though they make up for lost time when they grow older.

As Maurice alights and gazes at this, he sees, at the entrance of the garden, a Parisian workman, trying to ap-

pear interested in the gambols of some children near him, but still with his eyes upon everything passing in or out. The fellow gives him a knowing glance, and he recognizes him as one of the detective officers he has placed on guard over the safety of the prince.

So far his orders have been obeyed. He will see if the others are equally alert. He hastily forces his way through the crowd to all the entrances of the garden. At each of them, in some guise familiar to the Parisians of that day, is one of his emissaries on watch. To do this he is compelled to go nearly to the Porte de Neuilly. Consequently, before he returns to the main entrance he has disposed of about fifteen minutes. It is now two o'clock, and as yet he has not placed his eyes upon the young lady he is so anxious to see.

He hardly thinks she has yet arrived, it is so early. If she comes from Passy, she will undoubtedly pass in by the main entrance, so he posts himself near it and looks for his fair conspirator—for he has now come to regard the flower-girl of the Jardin d'Acclimatation in that light.

Absorbed with this matter, his eyes note only females, till suddenly he hears: "By Jove! you're on hand also, Maurice—looking very hard for her? Eh, old fellow?"

"What do you mean, de Frontinac?" says the chevalier, bowing to a couple of young men who, dressed in the extreme of fashion, are just coming from the Porte de Sablons and crossing the little bridge over the brook that, further in the garden, makes the pond in which the ducks and swans play—also, the children, when the *gendarmes* don't see them. One of them has spoken to him.

"Oh! that you've scented the perfume of *la belle* Louise's flowers!" laughs de Frontinac. "We're on the same errand. But permit me to present Monsieur Higgins. You may have met him in Mexico. He comes from across the Atlantic. Le Chevalier de Verney, Monsieur Higgins."

"You've got rather good eyes if you've seen me in Mexico," remarks Higgins, who would be a representative Yankee, had he not been washed out and partially obliterated by absinthe during the few months he has been in Paris. "I've never been nearer to that country than Boston Common. I've only seen Mexico from Harvard

observatory. It's about three thousand miles, I believe; but our telescopes beat the world. George! I wish I had one now."

Here the gentleman stops to rub his eye-glasses, as a very pretty woman has just passed him.

"De Frontinac's knowledge of geography is small," remarks Maurice sarcastically. "He hasn't had the advantages of your common-school system, Monsieur Higgins."

"Louise is not here," interrupts the American, who has been persistently and carefully gazing into the garden during this conversation.

"Oh! She'll turn up soon—she's certain to come, for the day is so fine the Prince Imperial is sure to be on hand and give her a *louis* for a rose."

"Yes, and precious little chance we have when royalty's around. I believe the 'hope of France' is mashed on her," murmurs Higgins. "Let's go to the *Kiosques des Concerts*—I hear the band playing now—she'll probably be there!"

"Come on, Maurice," cries de Frontinac, and the three young men stroll into the beautiful grounds. Crossing another rustic bridge over the little stream, filled with aquatic plants, unheeding the jabber of the monkeys, they turn away to their left and make for the music of the band.

"Hold up a minute," cries de Frontinac to Maurice. "You walk too fast for me to ask questions. When does the masked wrestler make his next appearance?"

"How should I know?" says de Verney, suddenly stopping, chewing his mustache, and gazing his friend in the eye.

"Well, you needn't be huffy about the question, old fellow," mutters the other; "I asked you once the same thing, and you struck it to the very day: February 15th. I can show you the posters for it."

"One fortunate guess does not make me a fortune-teller," laughs de Verney. "Why did you want to know?"

"It's on my account," remarks Higgins. "There are some girls from New York whose mother has said No, with a very big N, to *Le Mabille;* and we've compromised on the masked wrestler. They've put off a trip to

Italy on account of him. They're too pretty to disappoint. It's such an awful rush for tickets, so, if you could give us a hint, we might be ahead of time. Those girls are simply crazy to go—I've told 'em he's the greatest physical sight on earth."

"Of course he is! You don't have any such *artists de force* in America," says de Frontinac, bubbling over with French pride.

"No—a—not at present. We've a baseball club and one or two prize-fighters—nothing to brag of. You see, we're too intellectual; we develop the mind in Boston at the expense of the muscle. We'll never get there!" says this young New-Englander of 1868 quite sadly; for, not being a prophet, he cannot see the crown of glory the mighty Sullivan of later days is to bring to his beloved modern Athens. After a moment's philosophical and meditative unhappiness at the idea, he brightens up, however, and mutters half dreamily, "I wonder who the masked wrestler is, anyway?"

"That's what all Paris has guessed and still guesses," interjects de Frontinac. "Half the belles of the Rue St. Honoré and the Tuileries would give everything but their beauty for his address to send him a *billet-doux*."

"But they can't find it," mutters Maurice under his breath. Then he pauses suddenly and says, "Ah! ah!" for he is looking at the most beautiful thing he has yet seen in the world.

"By Jove! There she is! Look at her hair!" murmurs Higgins.

"Louise! more stunning than ever!" echoes de Frontinac. "Come and buy a flower from her, Maurice. For that, you only need the introduction a five-franc piece will give you."

Then the two young men hurry on, and elbow their way through the press, for there is always a little crowd about her, buying posies from her fair hands, and trying by double prices to purchase from her lips kindly words or her eyes sweet glances—boys as well as men—but no girls nor women. She seems a loadstone for everything masculine—perhaps to repel, certainly not to attract, everything feminine.

As for de Verney, he simply stands and gazes at her for a minute or so, though his mind notes these facts. Then

he looks for a hundred seconds or so more, and thinks very hard; next, as if it were a difficult task to tear himself away from what he sees, resolutely turns his back upon Louise, the flower-girl of the Jardin d'Acclimatation, strides rapidly to the gate, calls his phaeton, gives his horses their heads, and flies home as fast as they can draw him, scarcely noticing the Prince Imperial as he passes him in the Champs Elysées driving for the Bois, and followed at a little distance by young Microbe and another *officier de sûreté*, who are taking good care of that royal youth this afternoon. Arriving at the Rue d'Hautville, Maurice bolts up to his apartments and then, as rapidly as possible, makes an *entirely new toilet*, coming down-stairs again in modest dark clothes that show his graceful athletic figure to superb advantage, and give him the appearance of being perfectly unpretentious, though elegant and gentlemanly to the tips of his nails.

He is no longer the beau of the boulevards; for, in the three minutes he has looked at Louise the flower-girl, he has made up his mind that no beau of the boulevards will ever charm the intellect, or win the admiration or love of such a woman.

For this is the picture he saw, and that which is still in his head, as he drives rapidly back, anxious to see it again:

A girl's face, perhaps sixteen, perhaps eighteen, perhaps twenty. Its eyes so dark they would be gloomy were they not full of an enthusiasm which makes them beam, and an excitement that makes them flash with a fire perhaps as holy as that of a Roman vestal, perchance as cruel as that of some priestess of the Indian Goddess of Death.—Which? Maurice cannot as yet determine; he only knows that it is beautiful. Its brow would be classic as that of a Greek statue, had it not more intellect than ancient art usually gave to woman. Its mouth is also contradictory, the lower lip indicating passion, the upper one the firmness to repress it; the cheeks modestly blushing, the nose haughty. A mass of contradictions—the whole bewilderingly beautiful!

Is it a good face or a bad one? On this de Verney meditates. "Her hair is blonde," he finally mutters to himself; "Heaven grant it may be dyed in the fashion of

this day's craze for yellow hair, for, if it is *natural*—WHEUGH!"

Here he gives a long whistle, then continues: "'Beware of serpents and natural blondes whose eyes have sparks in them!' Will her beauty make me forget this maxim?"

Then he gives a little laugh, which changes into a start, and suddenly mutters, "A WOMAN LIKE THE ONE I'VE SEEN HAS THE RESOLUTION TO KILL THE PRINCE WITH HER OWN HAND," and drives faster than ever.

After a little consideration, however, he casts away any idea of immediate danger to his charge; the plot, whatever it be, is evidently not yet ripe for action.

He now gives a glance at his surroundings. He has come back at a speed that has been horrifying to the *sergents de ville* passed on his way. He has been once warned on the Champs Elysées, and twice cautioned on the Avenue de l'Impératrice, and, had he not been very well known, would doubtless have been arrested; for he has paid no attention to the polite remonstrances of these guardians of the peace.

Such has been his speed that he has made his trip to the Rue d'Hautville and back, together with change of raiment, in an hour and a half. He drives into the crowd at the entrance of the Jardin d'Acclimatation, saluting Le deux Aquardo, and, returning the kindly bow of Rossini (who is now enjoying the last songs of the spring birds that master of melody shall hear on earth), looks at his watch, and is relieved to see that it indicates only twenty-five minutes to four.

The throng is much greater than when he left. There are many more ladies, who have driven out in state to see their children enjoy the fluttering of the pigeons in their dove-cot, ride in the carriages drawn by ostriches, or laugh at the grotesque *comédie humaine* the monkeys and apes go through *ad nauseam* in their commodious quarters. Four in five of these ladies of fashion have yellow heads, following the craze introduced by the *cocottes* of Quartier Brèda; all of whom are at this time blondes, natural or unnatural. Most of them have discarded crinoline for the *pannier* costumes that Monsieur Worth has just introduced to delight women and astonish mankind. As was the custom of that day, most of these are of flashing Bismarck browns,

Solferino reds, or Pompadour greens, that charm the paraquets of the garden who imagine other birds of brilliant plumage have come to visit them, and chatter at their gorgeous guests, as if expecting reply.

Passing through this brilliant crowd, and only returning the bow Madame de Pourtales makes him and the smile and word that the beautiful Mademoiselle de Walewska gives him, Maurice makes straight for the sound of the band that is playing *La Mandolinata*, which is just becoming the popular tune of the day—for he imagines there will be the Prince and there the flower-girl. But neither Prince nor flower-girl is there.

In looking about for them, he passes one of the entrances to the garden and notes that the officer on guard there has disappeared. A hasty examination of the other gates shows that this is the case at all of them. It flashes across Maurice that there is a reason for this. The Prince has left the garden and the officers, to better watch over him, have followed! Where have they gone?

This question is soon answered by young Microbe. This worthy is now dressed as only a *petite crévé*, pure, simple, and unredeemed, can be. He has lavender trousers that fit him like gloves, save upon the boots, over which they are spread out with the amplitude a Spanish vaquero gives to his leather leggins, only showing the tips of the toes of his little patent leathers. A very low-cut vest of embossed velvet exhibits an immensity of white shirt-bosom, with a small ruffle and large diamond of pasty splendor. This shirt is of the *décolleté* description, and with its low-rolling, turned-down collar and loosely tied crimson cravat displays as much of bare neck as many modest women do in evening dress. This neck is by no means handsome, being yellow and skinny, but Microbe seems to be rather proud of it. A burnished stove-pipe hat and rather sloppy-looking frock-coat, together with a pair of lilac gloves which emit the odor of benzine, showing them to have been hastily cleaned, together with some finger-rings he wears as adornments to a very brazen-looking watch-chain, complete his elegant appearance.

He leaves two ladies of very dashing style and brilliant toilet, and strolls past Maurice, giving him a wink.

[illegible]

[illegible] says Maurice enthusiastically. "That stout one is Theresa, who is bringing Paris crazy at the moment."

"[illegible]," [illegible] de Verney, who has seen her perhaps a dozen times.

"And the other is Mademoiselle [illegible] de Villeneuis, the great successor to the grand [illegible] at the Ma-[illegible]. I danced a [illegible] in the same quadrille with her last Sunday night. Like to be introduced?"

"[illegible]," says Maurice sharply.

"No, of course not. I'm not going to be seen with you to-day," replies Maurice with a little wink. "But at the Mabille Sunday."

He has no time to say more, for the chevalier cuts in again. "What game was the Prince playing with his friends for which Louise gives prizes?"

The answer startles him:

"*Hide and seek! And Louise presents flowers to the one who hides the longest!*"

HIDE AND SEEK! THE GAME MENTIONED IN THE CIPHER! WHAT MIGHT BE DONE TO THE PRINCE WHEN CONCEALED FROM HIS COMPANIONS?

As this thought comes to de Verney, he hurriedly asks, "Does Louise hide with them?"

"Oh, no ! she remains with the tutor and the others. She does not seem interested save in selling flowers to passers-by. I've bought three roses already and made her more enraged at every purchase."

"Where are the officers ?"

"In hiding, about the thickets near the Prince, to see that no one but his playmates approach him."

"Very well," says Maurice, "you will not forget my instructions for this afternoon, Monsieur Microbe."

"Certainly not."

"Now I'll go and see what I can make out of this game of hide and seek," mutters de Verney, and he strides toward the main entrance to the Jardin d'Acclimatation, that will let him out near the road to the Madrid, at this time one of the popular resorts of the park.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FATE OF THE MABILLE SUIT.

TURNING sharply to his right from the Jardin d'Acclimatation, Maurice has hardly proceeded a couple of hundred yards when he sees the imperial liveries upon a carriage drawn up alongside the road to the Madrid. There are several other private carriages standing near, the occupants of them having stopped to look at the heir of France, throwing off his dignity and becoming for a short happy hour or two only a boy.

Quite a little crowd of pedestrians have been attracted to the place, most of these keeping at a respectful distance ; though a few, whose positions, titles, or intimacy at court have given them a personal acquaintance with the Prince, have practically joined the imperial party.

Among these Maurice places himself ; for though he does not wish Louise to imagine him very closely connected with the governing power of France, still he is desperately anxious to accurately observe both the bearing and actions of the flower-girl, and she stands very near the Prince Imperial's tutor, who is watching the game in a short-sighted and perfunctory manner through a pair of spectacles.

The Prince and his companions are now in hiding, one of them, his particular friend, the boy Conneau, is the seeking party, and is wandering through the thickets and trees, with which the slightly rising ground is studded, in pursuit of the others. The prince is not here to recognize him, and Maurice can now make his observations of Louise Tourney without her learning he is acquainted with the royal prey he imagines she is pursuing.

He strolls through the group and leisurely asks her for a *boutonnière*. She gracefully pins it in his coat, but as she does so, a pair of feverish eyes look into his and stagger him. Eyes that have not the hope of youth nor the calmness of age—only the anxiety of some great strain upon the mind, something that keeps her nervous system at a constant unrelaxing tension, that makes it like the *C*-string of a highly-tuned violin— a breeze blowing against it, it will cry out ; another turn of the key and it will snap asunder. He tries to think where he has seen such eyes before.

She says " Thank you !" for his five-franc piece. It is the first time he has heard her speak, and it is a sensation.

Her voice is low and sweet, but how determined. When age has taken away its sweetness, it may be hard.

He steps back and enters into conversation with the Prince's tutor. This gentleman knows him very well by sight, and is, with the vanity peculiar to weak minds, delighted to be addressed by so distinguished a gentleman as Monsieur de Verney.

While Maurice is talking to him, and judging how much aid he can hope for, in case of necessity, from the tutor, his eyes are following the flower-girl as she trips from one person to another disposing of her pretty wares, which now seem to be nearly exhausted.

Her dress is something like a peasant's, not of prim, staid Normandy nor Brittany, he is glad to notice, but of some more southern clime—perhaps from the sunny slopes of the Pyrenees. The whole effect, though not rich, is very graceful and softly pretty, and the dress is some light cambric that becomes the girlish figure that is hardly as yet developed, for the short skirts show a foot and ankle that suit the costume ; they are small enough and well-shaped enough to have come even from Cordova or Seville.

But, while selling flowers or replying to some of the remarks that a few of the ladies make to her, her eyes always have the same fevered, excited look ; though, curiously enough, Maurice thinks the girl never seems to notice anything pertaining to the Prince's game—she simply attends to her business, which is quite a lucrative one.

A few moments after Maurice's arrival, Monsieur Microbe comes along, still accompanied by the two ladies he had by his side when first seen.

This young gentleman nonchalantly insinuates himself into the court circle, and begs to trouble Miss Louise for a floweret. The girl has seen him coming. De Verney can tell, from the way her eyes gleam, that she already detests her customer. She bristles up ready for combat.

At seeing her attitude, Monsieur Microbe astonishes her : he takes his flower, pays her, bows humbly, and leaves her without a word. A moment after, as if struck by a sudden thought, he steps back to her and says a few words. The girl's cheeks suddenly pale. If anything could crush young Microbe, her glance would ; but he treads jauntily back to his companions, while she gazes at him with an evil eye.

Maurice has been unable to catch what Microbe has said to Louise, but, being near the ladies accompanying that gentleman, he overhears their conversation.

" What did you say to that child to put her in such a rage, my Romeo of the *can-can ?* See ! Mademoiselle has torn up one of her roses in her temper ! " giggles La Theresa.

" Oh ! " replies Microbe, " I simply told her that I had heard that she sang under the *nom de theatre* of Theresa, and that I was going to the Alcazar to-night. I would be in the gallery, and she could know me by my feet hanging over."

" Ah ! poor thing ! You hurt her feelings ; you took her for La Theresa ! " cries La Millepieds, laughing.

At which the fascinating Theresa gives her a savage glance.

Five minutes after this, Microbe strolls back to the flower-girl again. She has not noticed his coming. He says : " I beg your pardon for mistaking you, made-

moiselle, for La Theresa, who has charmed Paris by her singing at the Alcazar."

The girl does not answer a word to this, but turns her head away.

"Mademoiselle, I ask your pardon humbly," murmurs Microbe with a grin. "I know how it wounds one great artist to be mistaken for another. I have just learned that you are the celebrated La Millepieds. This evening I go to *Le Mabille.* I shall dance myself; you may recognize me by my rose *Vive le can-can!*" Here it is well Monsieur Microbe skips away, for the girl might have attacked him with her hands and nails, and the crowd would probably have given the young man an impromptu bath in the stream that was conveniently near; for Louise, the flower-girl, was very popular with the *habitués* of the Bois de Boulogne.

Maurice himself, though not hearing this conversation, catches a glimpse of Louise's face, and sets his teeth and clinches his hands as he sees how well his assistant actor is playing his part of heavy villain, though the cue for his *rôle* of romantic hero has not as yet come. He feels ashamed of himself for the plot he has invented for gaining this girl's acquaintance, but at the same moment is strong enough to say that the game must be played out to the end, for he has just heard some rather commonplace but ominous information from the tutor, and a little thing now occurs that makes his suspicions of the flower-girl very near to certainties.

Maurice has not conversed with the tutor three minutes before he finds he is just the man to be of no use to himself or any one else in an emergency. This gentleman has been selected for his important post on account of his knowledge of books, not men; and, though very well calculated to instruct his royal charge in Latin, Greek, mathematics and philosophy, is one of those highly theoretical creatures who are never practical.

He informs Maurice that he has reported to the Emperor how much the Prince was pleased with the beauty and accomplishments of this flower-girl. The Emperor had said: "At thirteen the heart is not dangerous. If my son two years from now looks at a woman, let me know at once, but don't say anything about it to Louis."

"I myself think the child is charming," murmurs this

man of books ; "she is so intelligent for her years, and so well read for one in her station in life."

"Then you've had some conversation with her ?" remarks Maurice.

"Oh, often !"

"Often ? You have known her long ?"

"About three weeks ! She presented the Prince with a beautiful bouquet on his Easter drive in the Bois, and he took an immediate fancy to her. Consequently I have often, while his highness is playing, given Miss Louise good advice—she is so innocent, and Paris is, I am informed, considered wicked."

"Ah ! What advice did you give ?"

"Well !" remarks the tutor with a smile, "I warned the young lady to beware of young gentlemen of fashion like you, Monsieur de Verney !"

"And Louise said ?" asks Maurice rather eagerly.

"Louise said," continues Mr. Bookworm, "that gentlemen like me were much *more* dangerous. Intellect always attracted *her*. She is very talented."

"Talented enough to twist you round her pretty little finger," thinks Maurice, for the tutor seems to swell with vanity as he relates his intellectual conquest.

"She pinned this bud in my button-hole. It is a yellow rose. Do you think she can be jealous of me ? You know the language of flowers, Monsieur de Verney ?" babbles the tutor.

"I hope you've not given the poor girl cause," says Maurice dryly, favoring him with a wink. At which flattery the other sniggles and calls him a wit, and opens his heart to him and tells him everything he knows, which in the chevalier's accurate mind assumes this condensed form :

The intimacy between the Prince and the flower-girl has gradually become closer, until now the boy insists on seeing and buying flowers from her every time he drives in the Bois, which is about three times a week, generally Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays, but not always. As, for instance, this Tuesday, the weather being fine, advantage has been taken of this for a drive. For the last week the Prince has generally brought some of his friends with him, as he has fallen in love with the English game of hide and seek, that he and his friends usually

play in this spot. That the tutor is not sure, but rather thinks that the game was suggested by Louise. Anyway, she takes a great interest in it, and gives a prize of flowers *to the boy who is not found*, WHICH THE PRINCE GENERALLY WINS. He has some hiding-place in which no one has as yet discovered him.

"By George!" says Maurice, suddenly. "How long has he been hiding now?"

"About half an hour. It is perfectly safe here. The boy couldn't get lost in this park crowded with people."

"Isn't he lost now?" whispers de Verney. "That boy Conneau has found every one of the party but the Prince. Do you think you could discover him in those thickets if a boy could not?"

"Of course; but that's part of the game," remarks the tutor, complaisantly. "However, you see he is coming in now."

For young Conneau has by this time given the search up, and has yelled out this fact till the Prince has heard it and come out of hiding.

Maurice looks at the flower-girl. She is still selling flowers, but, as the two boys run down the hill to her, she turns to them, cries "*Voici!*" and waves a great bunch of white roses that she has kept reserved for the prize, in the bottom of her basket.

"Perhaps she'd better not learn that the Prince knows me," thinks de Verney, moving to the rear of the little crowd, but still where he can closely observe Louise.

The girl stands like a fair picture of spring, holding out the flowers in one hand, and beckoning the two youths to her with the other white member.

As they approach her, the boys slacken their pace, and she bestows the prize saying, "Your highness always wins."

"Yes, *we* know the place, don't we, Mademoiselle Louise!" cries the royal boy, the flush of triumph, youth and happiness upon his face. Then he bows to her, little gentleman that he is, and says, "*Mille remerciements, mademoiselle.*"

And as the boy gives her a gracious smile and smells his roses, Maurice can see the flower-girl's lips quiver. Her hand trembles as she gives him his prize, and there are tears in her eyes—tears of pity. Then suddenly the

face changes—into her eyes comes unconquerable resolution. They flame and flash, not as an animal at its prey, but like the eyes he has seen before somewhere, the eyes he suddenly remembers—they are those of Joan of Arc, in an old picture he had gazed on as a child.

He mutters to himself, "*Conspirator* and *patriot!*" then quite sadly, "*and so young!*"

He has no more time for philosophy or sentiment, for the Prince is preparing to go. He calls his companions together and divides his roses among them, even favoring his tutor with some, and keeping only one for himself. Then he remarks, "This to remember you! Au revoir!" and mounting his carriage is driven off.

Maurice takes a good look to see that some of his *officiers de sûreté* are on guard near the unsuspecting boy's equipage, then places his eye on Louise from a safe distance. She makes a pretense of selling a few more flowers—and after a little time, apparently with empty basket, takes her departure on foot, walking down the road to the Madrid, till she meets an intersecting path leading to the lakes and in the direction of the Porte de Passy.

This is only a little over a mile and a half from here, and, the afternoon being fine, is but a pleasant walk for a girl of her health, strength and youth.

This coincides with the girl's address, as Maurice has received it from Monsieur Microbe. Not wishing to appear to follow her, he strides rapidly back to the Jardin d'Acclimatation and encounters the crowd that is now streaming from its gates to return to Paris. This is now embellished by a number of coco venders and providers of other cooling drinks, who, [illegible]ating business, have wandered from their more natural haunts of the Champs Elysées, to do a good trade among the thirsty children that are now taking a last squint, this afternoon, at their animal pets, which some of them may eat two years after, with a very fair appetite, during the siege of Paris by the conquering Teuton.

Elbowing his way through this motley throng, Maurice calls his groom, mounts his phaeton, and bowls along toward the Porte de Passy at a slashing gait, for he must arrive there before the flower-girl, for whom this after-

noon he has prepared a romantic and unexpected episode.

Passing the Porte Dauphin to his left, he drives directly down the Allée des Fortifications, thus avoiding the concourse of broughams, victorias, landaus, and carriages of all descriptions now thronging from the lakes towards the Avenue de l'Impératrice *en route* for Paris; and, in less than twenty minutes, notwithstanding he again encounters a crowd coming in from the Carrefour des Cascades, finds himself in quite a crush of vehicles at the Porte de Passy.

The speed at which he has come makes him certain, if the girl takes a direct route to her home, that he will see her pass through this entrance to the Bois.

He stops his horses and remains near the gate, quite sure that she will not notice him, as the crowd of carriages is so great; and, though cursed under their breaths by many returning jehus, holds his position for ten minutes or more, till he sees the young lady he is looking for among the pedestrians that are passing from the Bois through what was then called the Boulevard Rossini toward the little railroad station of Passy.

Driving slowly along, he contrives to keep her in sight, though at a distance, as she turns into the Avenue du Ranelagh and past the railroad.

Here she takes a sharp turn to the right, and a minute after is in the less frequented Rue de Vignes.

In 1868 this street has almost the air of the country; a few villas, some gardens, and unimproved land waiting for the builder to make up a good part of its landscape. As soon as she is out of the crowd, the girl slackens her pace, as if in deep thought; then, being quite alone, after a minute, takes from her pocket a letter and reads it as she walks along.

Its contents are not altogether pleasing. Maurice can see her once or twice give a gesture of almost anger, though she is at too great a distance for him to discern any other details.

This is the street upon which Louise lives, according to Microbe's report. Maurice drives along about two hundred yards behind her, looking for the *dénouement*.

He has not very long to wait, for he has driven only a few minutes when he sees Monsieur Microbe saunter out

of a little cross-street. This fascinating creature gives Louise a sweet glance and remarks complacently "Ah, there ! "—then strikes an attitude, sucking the end of his little cane, and stands awaiting the approach of his victim.

The girl, looking up at his voice, sees him, crumples the letter in her hand, and for a moment seems to hesitate ; then, having made up her mind to face her tormentor—for she has guessed the errand that young Microbe comes upon—walks resolutely up to him, with eyes flaming, though she turns her head away and would pass him without a word, if this representative of the depraved *petite crévés* would but let her.

Maurice looks round ; there is no one to rob him of his *rôle* of hero ; the street is entirely deserted ; he can only see a couple of men working at some distance in a little garden. He mutters to himself, "Now, then, for the grand romantic ! " gives a little chuckle, and drives along to arrive in the nick of time.

Microbe, seeing Maurice, begins to play his cards boldly and in a hurry.

As the girl is about to pass him, he steps in front of her, and, with a low bow, remarks : "Mademoiselle did not do me the honor to say if she would dance with me at the Mabille this evening ! "

Louise only answers this with a glance ; but her beautiful face is pale as death, and if the girl were armed Microbe would have retreated ; for this young gentleman is an accurate student of human nature, and he thinks, in his light-hearted way, "Wouldn't mademoiselle like to put a knife in me ? "

As she is not, he continues : "Ah ! dumb to your humble admirer ? You can't mean it. I saw you the other evening at the Mabille. You dance very well ! "

"Liar ! " the girl hisses, for she is a woman and must speak.

"Indeed, you do. I assure you, you dance deliciously. But I am a dancer myself. I have on my Mabille clothes. Permit me to show my agility ! "

And, with this, Monsieur Microbe gives a few steps of a jumping-jack *pas seul* that would have made his fortune on the stage.

"Now I am sure you will not refuse me. The *can-can* begins at eleven ! *Ough ! Le diable !* "

This last is a yell of surprise and pain, for his victim has walked straight up to him and given him two sounding boxes upon the ear.

" Egad ! she can take care of herself ! " thinks Maurice, with a laugh, for he is now coming quite near.

" Ah, those slaps shall be repaid with kisses ! " cries Microbe, half in rage, half in love, for the girl's cheeks are now flaming, and her eyes are now flashing with a grand though terrible beauty. " You drove away poor Achille, your barber lover, but we boys of the Quartier Latin are different chaps ! " With the agility of a monkey and the strength of an ape, he seizes the beautiful and panting creature before him, and despite her struggles—for the girl only gives one loud, long scream, and then fights silently—he kisses twice the blushing cheeks.

Maurice, cursing his plot and ready to beat his accomplice to a jelly, drives forward with a muttered execration, for this last performance of Microbe seems to him a sacrilege—one entirely uncontemplated in his plan, even before he had seen the beauty of the girl. He will now avenge her in reality !

He has given his horses the lash. In another ten seconds he will be at the girl's side, when suddenly, down the little street, a big, brawny, broad-shouldered giant, in workingman's blouse, comes running, and with an awful German curse seizes young Microbe, twists him round to him face to face, and shakes him as a gorilla does a little teasing monkey.

Microbe gives one astonished gulp, then fights violently, courageously, and desperately, but with as much chance as if he were standing up to a Bengal tiger. He is shaken till his tongue is half bitten off. He thinks his heart will jump out of his mouth. Then the giant, with a contemptuous snort, pitches him over the hedge into the neighboring lot.

" What did he do ? " asks the German avenger hurriedly of the girl, who is rubbing her cheeks as if to wipe away something hateful.

" He kissed me ! " hisses Louise. " Kill him ! *Kill him ! !* KILL HIM ! ! ! "

With that the Teuton, as if to obey her order, jumps over the hedge after Microbe ; but that young man has recovered a little of his wind. As the German springs

into the field, he leaps out of it, and, pursued by the avenger of Louise, runs wildly down the street, proving himself, if not a boxer, at least a sprinter of first-rate speed.

The two disappear, and Maurice, who has watched the affair in astonished silence, mutters to himself very savagely: "I planned this scene for the benefit of a rustic Hercules."

All the time he is thinking how he may turn it to his advantage, and in some manner still make the flower-girl's acquaintance.

He has almost given up the idea, however, for it is but a poor hero who comes up after the battle is over, when he sees Louise, who has been following Microbe and his pursuer, suddenly stop. She utters a little cry, and begins to search hurriedly for something upon the ground.

This something he catches sight of. Driving quickly to the spot he jumps out and picks up a letter.

Raising his hat he politely says: "Is this what you are seeking, mademoiselle?"

The girl gives a start, looks relieved, and almost joyously cries: "Yes! I dropped it when that wretch seized me." Then holds out her hand eagerly for it.

Here Maurice gives a start also, for he suddenly notices that the envelope inclosing this letter is yellow and has no stamp or postmark on it, and, contriving to catch a glimpse of the address, sees the identical handwriting of the chemical treatise written by the man Hermann, that he had glanced at that morning at No. 55 Rue de Maubeuge.

In a flash it comes to him—this is one of the two notes left at the flower kiosk in the Boulevard Montmartre.

Then he quietly hands her the letter, remarking: "I saw the insult offered you, and had hoped to arrive in time to resent it, but another was more fortunate. In his absence, can I offer to see you safely to your home?"

While he is making this speech, the girl has hurriedly glanced at the letter as if to be sure it is the one she lost, and then shoved it in her pocket. She now replies, "I am much obliged, but I think you had better not."

"I don't like to leave you unprotected, that man may return," persists Maurice.

At this he gets more information and another surprise. The girl gives a malicious laugh and says, "If Auguste, my"—she checks herself, then goes on hurriedly—"my guardian gets hold of him again, there won't be much of that man to come back."

"Auguste is ——"

"My guardian, and the man whom you saw punish the wretch who insulted me," cries the girl. Then she continues, "Perhaps he'd better not see you here; he is very jeal—impulsive, and was once professor of athletics at Heidelberg!"

"Oh! you fear for my safety!" laughs Maurice. "I am sure I can satisfy your guardian, and I hope mademoiselle does not doubt me?" This last a little tenderly, for face to face with this beauty his heart is beating quickly.

"No—o," contemplatively.

"You surely do not class me with the wretch who has just now annoyed you?" This is said in a tone of indignation.

"No!" she returns. "You are not even like the gallants of the court, some of whom have persecuted me, though more politely than that creature who, I believe, stated he represented the Quartier Latin. No,"—then she looks Maurice over from head to foot, and mutters, "You are very different from any who have presumed on my being a flower-girl; your dress shows me you are a gentleman."

Here Maurice blesses the philosophy that made him drive nine miles to change his clothes.

"If you think so well of me," he says, "let me offer my escort. I should not like to leave you alone after the episode I saw but a minute ago."

Once more Louise astonishes him. She gives him a little laugh that has a mock in it and returns, "Very well, if you will brave my guardian. I hope you won't be tired; my home is but fifty yards away, Monsieur de Verney!"—pointing up the cross-street, from which the avenger issued, to a little two-story house that sits some fifty feet away from the street, and is backed by a garden and conservatories, from which evidently the flowers she sells are picked. At the gate of this place an old German woman is caressing a large, lazy, gray cat, that is seated on one of its posts.

"You know my name?" says Maurice, somewhat surprised.

"Very well," the girl replies, unaffectedly. "Your equipage"—here she glances at the stylish turn-out—"is frequently seen in the Bois."

"Quite a compliment for my horses and flunkies," mutters Maurice, wincing, for even great men are sometimes vain. Then he continues, "I had hoped, when you mentioned my name, it had become known to you in a more worthy way."

His tone of annoyance in this remark is flattering to the young lady. She says, "I have also heard that you are considered a very clever man, and are sometimes consulted by the Emperor; but, if you wish to be sure I get safely home, follow me. I see Mother Gretchen and Lamla looking for me at the gate." She turns and walks up the little street, Maurice thinks rather briskly.

The old German woman seeing this, goes back slowly to the house, and the cat follows her example.

In answer to de Verney's inquiring look, Louise explains, "Gretchen is Auguste's mother; she takes care of the house for her son, and the rest of her time helps to cultivate his roses. You see, we are all German, and work."

"Yes," replies Maurice, "your hands show that!" and he looks at the two small, white ones of his companion—one of which is doing nothing, and the other toying with her last rose-bud—for he is gallantly carrying her basket.

"And who is Lamla?" asks de Verney after a momentary pause, with perhaps a tone of jealousy.

"Oh! Lamla is the cat." Here the girl looks at him and laughs. "Don't look angry. I don't love cats."

During this short walk, Maurice had been thinking rapidly, and had made up his mind to two things—one is that the girl intends to bid him good-by at the gate, and the other is, that he will see the inside of that house.

As soon as they get near the entrance to the garden, he steps rapidly forward and up the walk to the house.

The girl with a little cry springs after him, and, almost seizing his arm, says, "Where are you going?"

"To put your basket inside, of course," he says lightly, gazing into her face, which is quite pale, and looks older than he had before thought it to be—perhaps twenty-two

or three. "I'm a Frenchman, and could not permit a young lady to carry her basket even up the walk."

"Then why did you not offer to do that for me on the Bois de Boulogne—if you are so gallant?" says the girl, with a mocking laugh.

"Besides, I hope to be introduced to Mamma Gretchen?" During this, Maurice has edged a little nearer the door, which the old woman has left open for the entrance of Louise.

"You must not go in——"

But, while she says this, the trick has been done. Maurice has stepped into the door, deposited the basket in the hall, and taken a hurried *coup d'œil* of the house. A stairway leads up to the second story, and an open door permits a glance at the sitting-room—this is furnished in extraordinary style for the home of a flower-gardener. He has noted a piano, and altogether too much luxury for people of this class.

"You have a very pretty little cage," he murmurs, stepping out to her, apparently unheeding the flash there is in her eyes.

Then she whispers to him with quivering lips: "Why don't you heed me? Can't you see, I tremble for fear my guardian may find you here?"

"I can protect myself!" returns Maurice, half angrily; for he thinks: "Does this girl believe *I'm* a coward?"

Her answer makes him ashamed of himself. "But *me*," she says—"but *me!* Auguste is so—so impulsive. He is my guardian."

Just at this moment, however, Herr Auguste arrives, to give his own character in person.

His burly arm swings the gate to with a crash—his burly body slouches savagely up the walk. His burly voice, speaking Alsacian German, growls: "Here's another of them! *Ein tausend Teufels!*"—while he would advance almost threateningly on the Frenchman, were not the girl in his way.

She has run down the path to him, and a few moments of hurried conversation takes place between the man and his ward. Maurice only catches "influence" and "power," but, whatever it is, the effect seems to be momentarily soothing to this German giant, who stands at least six feet high, is broad-shouldered and strong

in proportion, and for his weight seems extremely active.

Maurice notes this as the interview goes on near him, and the athlete's face gradually becomes more good-natured—but here a thing takes place that he cannot understand: he catches a glance between this man and woman such as guardian and ward seldom give each other, and wonders: "Can these two love?"

A moment after Louise comes up to him with the German and says, "Monsieur de Verney, let me introduce my guardian, Auguste Lieber, who wishes to thank you for the great service you have done for me to-day."

"Great service!" rather astounds Maurice. He imagines the young lady has been telling her guardian fibs; but the name Auguste Lieber suddenly recalls Regnier's report. This man is the proprietor of the flower kiosk in the Boulevard Montmartre. The two branches of the conspiracy are now coming very close together.

He, however, acknowledges the salute of the German, and compliments him on his pretty flowers; but even during this short speech Lieber seems anxious for him to be going; and, a moment after, remarks to Louise that dinner soon will be ready. Then turning to Maurice, as if this hint were not sufficient, says: "Monsieur de Verney, I would ask you to come again, but such rich noble people as you should not associate with such poor people as *we*. My ward is only a flower-girl, and no matter how honorable the nobleman who is kind to her, his kindness can only do her harm. Good-evening!"

This is said with a most exaggerated politeness of manner and a peculiar sarcastic inflexion upon the "poor" and "noble" in the speech, over which he seems to grind his teeth in rage and envy.

"Good-evening, monsieur," says Maurice, pleasantly; "good-evening, mademoiselle." He gives the girl, who has been biting her lips through this, the bow of a courtier. She holds out her hand. He presses it slightly. The pressure is returned.

He strolls down the walk, and as he does so the guardian gives the ward a letter he has taken from his pocket, and goes sulkily into the house.

The next moment Maurice steps back to the girl, and says: "You do not think so badly of me as your guard-

ian? Believe me, I feel how much your bread of life costs you. A flower-girl is exposed to so many temptations, so many insults." He is trying to see the letter that the girl carelessly holds in the folds of her dress.

Her answer startles him.

"*Thank God! it won't last long!*" Then she says impulsively: "I am told you are very influential. Some day I may——"

"Louise, come into the house!" cries Lieber very sharply, opening the front door.

Without a word the girl darts from de Verney and runs in, but, as she does so, he catches sight of the letter she has in her hand. *Its envelope is yellow!* Probably the second one written by the German chemist at No. 55 Rue de Maubeuge this day.

Meditating upon this fact and the words "Thank God! it won't last long!" and making up his mind as to his further action, the chevalier drives into the main portion of Paris, and straight to his room in the Rue d'Hautville.

Here he gets one sensation, and gives another.

They are both short and sharp.

François, as he lets him in, says with a significant grin: "He is in there!" pointing to the dining-room. "I did not dare place him in the parlor; he would have ruined the satin furniture."

"Who?" cries Maurice, impulsively striding to the dining-room, where a melancholy apparition rises up in front of him and shrieks: "Behold me! *Mon Dieu!* my Mabille suit!"

De Verney takes one look at him, then, after a gallant fight, gives a yell of laughter; for Microbe, the dashing dude of the Quartier Latin, has been transformed into one of Eugene Sue's most disreputable rag-pickers of Paris. His gorgeous vest is no more; his coat is slit from collar to waist; his lavender trousers are brown with mud; his burnished tile and natty cane have disappeared.

After a moment, Maurice by an effort controls himself, and manages to get out, "Did he catch you again?"

"*Le Diable!* Yes! Oh! how strong he is—the German brute!" screams poor Microbe. Then he mutters sadly, "I was to have danced at the Mabille next Sunday the *Grand Écart;* no one in France does it like me. The

crowds scream at me ; my partner is as graceful as I am ! " Here he utters a yell of despair, "*Mon Dieu !* Poor Clothilde ! She will dance with some one else ! "—and two tears of hopeless misery struggle out of his eyes and make marks upon his dirty cheeks.

De Verney, who has forgotten by this time his rage at Microbe's kisses to Louise, says after a moment, " You did this under my orders. How much will it cost to replace your Mabille suit ? "

" You—you will do this for me ? " mutters Microbe in an anxious, trembling voice. Then, without waiting for an answer, he cries, " Two hundred and fifty francs, but Levy, the tailor of the Rue du Temple, will demand only half down—one hundred and twenty-five francs. That's all—only a hundred and twenty-five francs—my savior de Verney ! "

" Here are three hundred ! " says Maurice quietly, and gives him the money. " You're not hurt, I hope ? "

" Hurt ? No ! Only with your kindness ! " and, after the impulsive manner of his nation, he kisses de Verney's hand—and, though Maurice does not know it, he has put out capital at long and compound interest that will come back to him in words that make the difference of life and death.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BROKEN THREAD.

A FEW minutes after this he sends Microbe away—first to give a note to Monsieur Claude at the *Bureau de Sûreté*, asking him to send some more officers to relieve those on watch over Hermann Margo and the flower kiosk during the night ; so that Regnier, Marcillac, and Jolly may report to him the results of their day's observations. This is to be done as rapidly as possible. Microbe is to make himself respectable once more, get some dinner, and come back to him by half-past seven at the latest.

It is now six o'clock in the afternoon, and an hour and thirty minutes is not a great deal of time in which to do these things ; but the girl's words, " it won't last long,"

have impressed themselves on the chevalier's mind, and he can't get out of his head that the *dénouement* is drawing quite near.

An hour after this Regnier and Marcillac arrive.

Regnier reports as follows: "Nothing happened at flower kiosk after he sent last report, except that Auguste Lieber, the proprietor, came back shortly after the man Hermann left his last yellow letter and departed on his promenade with his red rose-bud. Lieber looked after his business half an hour, and then went away toward his home at Passy. When he had gone, the second letter of the German's disappeared also."

This is what Maurice had expected. He now inquires about the girl who acts as Lieber's assistant at the flower kiosk, and learns that her name is Rose; she is sixteen, has occupied her position for two years, being one of the fixtures transferred by the former proprietor when he sold out to Lieber a month ago. "You can see her yourself," remarks Regnier. "Rose sells flowers at the *Variétés* every night."

"Very well," returns Maurice, "I will try and drop into that theater this evening and interview Mademoiselle Rose."

Then he turns to Marcillac and is told that the man Hermann returned to No. 55 Rue de Maubeuge at 3 P. M. Jolly came back after him. At about six he went out again, this time carrying a good-sized bundle. Monsieur Jolly followed him, and will report his actions on both journeys.

Maurice then lets the men go, ordering them to report to him the next day, and waits anxiously for Jolly. Until he learns what passed on Hermann's promenades, he hardly dares to make another move.

Ten minutes after this, Jolly appears, excited, dejected, and out of breath.

"Has he run away from you?" queries de Verney, looking at his panting subordinate.

"He has done worse," mutters Jolly savagely. "He has made a fool of me and dodged me. I have been forty years on the force, and till to-night thought I knew Paris."

"Tell me about it!" says Maurice, very calm, but by no means happy.

"The first promenade of the villain Hermann," mutters Jolly, "was this: After I bolted from you this morning in his pursuit, he walked so fast I could hardly keep him in sight to the flower kiosk; there he left his second letter after the girl shook her head at him. Then he went along the boulevards on his usual promenade; but from leaving the kiosk his pace became that of a snail; he looked into every shop window, he paused at every crossing. The only way I could naturally keep behind him was to pretend to be lame. He was giving somebody every chance to see his red rose."

"What makes you think that?"

"I know that!" says Jolly solemnly, "because the flower was on his left side, and he always looked into every window over his right shoulder, thus keeping the rose in full view. He wanted that flower seen by somebody. The days he had on a white rose-bud he never troubled himself about it."

"Well?"

"Well, nothing happened till he had gone to the Madeleine and was on his return on the other side of the street. He was looking into a window, when a man passing hurriedly from the other direction brushed right up against him. That man was Auguste Lieber, the proprietor of the flower kiosk."

"They spoke to each other?"

"Not a word; but I had limped near to him, and after Lieber had passed on his way, Hermann——"

"Was putting a letter in his pocket?" asks Maurice eagerly.

"Not at all! He was preparing to make a cigarette; had just taken out his pouch of tobacco, and had a little piece of cigarette paper in his hand."

"Pish!" This is an exclamation of annoyance from de Verney.

"He strolled along making his cigarette, looked into two or three more shop-windows, and then left his snail's pace behind him, and started home at a very quick pace."

"*Did he smoke that cigarette?*" asks Maurice suddenly.

"I'm no fool," returns Jolly, with a grin of delight. "I kept my eyes on that cigarette. *He did not smoke it;*

he placed it in his pocket; then, after a time, produced another and smoked that."

"THEN, BY HEAVENS! THAT CIGARETTE PAPER CONTAINED THE WORDS TO COMPLETE THE CIPHER!" ejaculates de Verney. A moment after he says more quietly: "Continue your story!"

"Then," replies Jolly, "he got home, and Marcillac and I watched till about six, when out our man comes again—this time carrying a bundle. He starts off at a good pace, and I after him. He went to the Boulevard de Magenta; then he seemed to hesitate for a minute, in fact, at one time, turned north, as if going to the neighborhood of Montmartre; a minute after he started south as fast as his legs would take him, in his haste running against people—he is very short-sighted, and it was growing dusk.

"However, I kept my eyes on him, though that became more and more difficult; for every step took us nearer the crowded parts of the city. Hermann never stopped a second, even when we got to the Place de la Bastille, but darted across that, down the Rue du Temple. Paris seemed as familiar to him as it was to me. My task was now very difficult; it had become dark. He kept a pretty straight course to the Rue de Rivoli. Here he was nearly run over by an omnibus. I hoped that would stop him. I had come a mile and a half like a race-horse, and was panting; but no, he bolted down the Rue de Rivoli, turned sharp to his right through the Rue Louis Philippe and across that bridge, then into the labyrinth of streets in old Paris, finally crossing the river to the Quartier Maubert, where the rag-pickers and *chiffonniers* carry the offscourings of the city. Here he bolted into a building; I waited outside—he never came out. By going up four flights of stairs and walking down four other flights, there was another exit on to a little alley, and I, one of the oldest detectives on the force, never knew it," says Jolly sadly.

"And afterward?" cuts in Maurice, who has no time for sentimental police officers.

"Afterward I sought for that scoundrel Hermann in vain. The streets in that quarter are badly lighted. Finally I recrossed the river, took an omnibus, and came here."

"Very well, come out with me once more," remarks de Verney. He calls a cab, and they drive straight to the Rue de Maubeuge. Here the officer on watch reports nothing has happened. Jolly gets the keys from the *concierge*, and Maurice and he carefully examine Hermann's apartments again. They are generally as they were in the morning, with these exceptions: Maurice finds a tiny piece of half-charred cigarette paper on the hearth. It is hardly larger than a sixpence, but has a fragment of a written word upon it. As he descries this, he is sure the German has read and destroyed the words that completed the cipher.

He looks at the laboratory; the only change he can note is that the carbonic-acid gas apparatus has gone also.

"Give me as near as you can the size and shape of the bundle Hermann carried," he demands from Jolly; and, on receiving his answer, is satisfied that the German has carried this away with him.

A moment after, they turn to leave the rooms, and Maurice remarks: "Your friend Hermann has left these apartments to be away some days."

"How do you guess that?" the man returns in some surprise.

"Well, the Germans are a cleanly race. Monsieur Hermann has taken his tooth-brush with him. It was in his bed-room this morning; it has gone now!"

As the two go down the stairs together, de Verney suddenly turns to Jolly and asks if he can give him the name and address of a smart judge of the *Tribunal de Police Correctional.*

"Certainly," replies that officer, who is of course very well acquainted with the police-courts of the city, "Monsieur Theophile Mussan, 37 Boulevard de Strasbourg."

This is but a short distance from where they now are. Maurice orders the hackman to drive there, and in five minutes he is at Monsieur Mussan's, fortunately catching that gentleman at home.

After a few minutes' private conversation with that officer of justice, during which Maurice is compelled to show his authority from Monsieur Claude, and, finally, that from the Emperor direct; Mussan, his eyes very

wide open, sends hurriedly for his clerk, makes out a warrant, gives it to de Verney, and says: "To-morrow everything shall be as you order at ten o'clock. It is not precisely legal, but under these extraordinary circumstances I will do it. Good-evening!"

"*Au revoir*—much obliged!" returns de Verney, as he drives off, leaving the judge with an astounded look on his face, which is reflected by Monsieur Jolly, who can see no reason for this step.

Ordering Jolly to report in the morning, Maurice dismisses him, strides up to his apartment, and is quite relieved to find Microbe, who is once more like a human being, awaiting him.

"I had time to do all you requested, Monsieur de Verney. It is now a quarter to eight. I was here at half-past seven. Notwithstanding, I found time to drop in to Levy's and order my new Mabille suit."

"Curse your Mabille suit," mutters Maurice. "You are the only one who has any brains to speak of in your Rue de Jérusalem gang. Listen to me!" And he tells Microbe everything.

At this, the whole recital, the young man looks very serious, and whistles contemplatively. Then he says suddenly: "You have told me everything?"

"All but one point."

"Ah!"

"But of that I shall inform you before you leave here. Tell me what you think!"

"Well, first, I think that the German, who has disappeared, is to do the killing," remarks Microbe.

"Killing?"

"Yes, KILLING! unless they are crazy. They could never get the Prince out of France."

"I'm glad you agree with my idea that the crime they meditate is assassination, not kidnapping," says Maurice shortly. "It makes me feel that I am justified in any deception I may practice."

"Ah! on Mademoiselle Louise?" mutters Microbe, with a little laugh.

"Yes!" says de Verney sternly. "Have you anything else to suggest?"

"Yes; I imagine they are going to use some highly scientific means."

"Why?"

"Well, it's a kind of instinct."

"A woman's guess; but women as often hit it as men. This man Hermann is a chemist. That reminds me of something." With this Maurice writes a few lines to a scientific friend of his, gives it to François to deliver, telling him to keep the cab waiting at the door for him.

Having done this, he turns to Microbe, who has been in a state of contemplation, and astonishes him. He smiles upon his assistant and remarks: "By the bye, you've not got much chance of dancing at the Mabille next Sunday night."

"Oh! an excellent one. Levy will have my clothes ready when the cash is down, if he and his tailor die making them!" returns Monsieur Microbe confidently. "Did I not tell you I gave him the order to-night?"

"The clothes may be ready, but you won't," says Maurice with a smile. Then he goes on very sternly: "Microbe, you've got to go to jail!"

"Incredible! Who'll put me there?"

"I!"

"*You!* YOU! For what?"

"For insulting Mademoiselle Louise!"

"*Le diable!*" gasps the *élève* of the Rue de Jérusalem, and for a moment is overcome; then he staggers up, gets before Maurice, and, bowing humbly, says: "You wish my head for an offering to gain the heart of Mademoiselle Louise, so she will confide in you? Eh?"

"Precisely! Through losing sight of this man Hermann, I've lost one end of this thread. I'm going to keep a very close hold upon the other!" And, as he says this, de Verney's jaws come together with a snap, and a fire comes into his eyes that wonderfully impresses Monsieur Microbe.

He gives a prolonged whistle, then murmurs: "Great man! shall I go to jail now?"

"Certainly not," says Maurice, with a laugh. "I want you too much outside. There is the warrant for your arrest." Maurice tosses him a paper and goes on: "You will report for trial to-morrow to Monsieur Theophile Mussan."

"Great heavens!" gasps Microbe. "Theophile Mussan is the most severe judge in Paris!"

"Certainly. He's going to give you three months."

"Three months! *Mon Dieu!* Three months!" This is almost a shriek. Then he suddenly becomes wounded, and mutters: "And you think you can conduct this investigation without me, Monsieur de Verney?"

"Of course not. For the next three days you are part of my body—part of my brain," returns Maurice. "At 10 A. M. you will be tried; at 10:15 you will be sentenced; at 10:30 you will be free. You will walk in the front door of Mazas and out of the back. I have just arranged this matter with Monsieur Theophile Mussan."

"You're sure there is no mistake about the back door of Mazas?" inquires Microbe.

"Quite."

"Thank you!" Then he suddenly cries: "My heavens! what a risk you take, Monsieur de Verney! Hermann got instructions to-day. They may be the final ones—if they intend to kill that boy to-morrow!"

"That is what I go to find out to-night," mutters Maurice.

"Where?"

"At the other end of the string!"

"Ah! at Mademoiselle Louise's?"

"Yes—won't you come with me?"

"No, thank you!" Microbe's tone is so melancholy that Maurice bursts into a laugh, then says: "No, you had better not be seen with me by your friend Lieber; besides, I've other work for you. Go and find out all about Mademoiselle Rose, the flower-girl of the *Variétés Théâtre.*"

"Oh! I know all about Rose now," returns Microbe. "She's an old friend."

"Then pump her about the two yellow letters Hermann left at the flower kiosk—about her new master, Auguste Lieber; pump her *dry!*" whispers Maurice, for they have now come down-stairs and are standing beside the cab.

A moment after he mutters, half to himself: "I wish I could pump the other one."

"Get Louise's heart—pump that!" whispers Microbe in his ear.

"If she has one," returns Maurice, looking at his watch.

It is eight o'clock.

He says to the driver: "Rue des Vignes, near the Barrière de Passy! I'll show you the house!—double speed, double *pourboire!*" jumps in the hack, and is whirled away, muttering to himself: "How shall I discover if to-morrow is to be the end?" then groans, "It's almost an impossible problem!" A moment after he says, more hopefully: "Is it? A woman's heart is an instrument with more strings than one. If it won't sing a tenor tune, it'll play a bass. Let me find the string, and I'll play a *diable* of a tune!"

To find the string seems to be the trouble, for de Verney meditates upon this portion of his project till they get to the Rue des Vignes. Here he shows his driver the little house on the side street, that in the moonlight, surrounded by shrubs and flowers, looks too peaceful and happy a home to be the birthplace of conspiracy for the assassination of any one—least of all, an innocent child.

Alighting quietly, he is rejoiced to see that its occupants have not gone to bed, for there is a light in the parlor, and through its open windows, as he walks up the path, comes into the quiet night air a flood of melody from the piano he has noticed in the afternoon. He pauses and listens, and a moment after gets a start. Something rubs against his leg. Looking down he sees Lamla, the cat, purring at his feet and enjoying the music. A moment after, Louise's voice mingles with the tones of the instrument, and he starts with astonishment, for she is singing, with taste, expression, power, and brilliant execution, an aria that taxes the powers of even a *prima-donna*—the "Brindisi," from *Lucretia Borgia.*

He listens to this in astounded silence, and thinks: "This makes me feel like Lucretia waiting behind the curtain. I wonder if I've got the coffins ready yet;" then mutters: "A rather curious education for a flower-girl. If her voice had a little more sympathy, she'd be a rare find for a manager." With this he strides up to the door and knocks.

Louise has by this time begun a little German love-song, which stops as his knock begins. There is an exclamation of astonishment from the old German woman, who has evidently been one of the listeners, and a snort of disgust in the tones of the gigantic Alsacian.

This gentleman now throws open the door with some violence; he evidently does not like visitors. His face has perhaps some anxiety in it as he looks out, holding a lamp in his hand.

As soon as he sees who his visitor is, anxiety becomes rage. He says: "Ha! my aristocrat"—grinding the words to powder between his teeth as they issue from his mouth—"you do not seem to understand me! You were bid good-by with no come back in it. You gentlemen of the upper classes"—here he pulverizes his words again—"seem to be cursed fools. You cannot take a poor man's hint. Now, do you see that arm? That arm has thrown to the earth every man it ever got hold of! In Leipsic, Heidelberg and Strasburg, I was professor of athletics, and I felled every one who stood up against me. If you don't take my hint, you boulevard beauty, I'll smash you up worse than I did my poor little dandy of the Quartier Latin."

As he says the last of this, Auguste Lieber places his lamp on a little table in the hall in order to pounce upon and make mince-meat of Maurice.

As the Alsacian does this, de Verney remarks quietly: "It was in regard to that man I took the liberty of coming here, Monsieur Lieber. I have just had that fellow followed and arrested for insulting Miss Louise!"

"*Mein Gott!*" mutters the Alsacian, his face turning white.

"As a Parisian, I could not permit a young lady to be so insulted without seeing the scoundrel punished. Besides, if free, he might follow her again. The man's name is Ravel Microbe. You will have to appear and testify against him——"

"In a court of justice! I shall be cross-questioned by a lawyer!" cries Louise, leaving the piano and flying out into the hall with a white face.

While Mr. Lieber mutters savagely but tremulously: "*Herr Gott Himmel donner wetter!* We shall be examined by the police. We shall be questioned by a judge. We shall have to——"

"To do nothing of the kind!" remarks de Verney, calmly. "I came here this evening to save you any such trouble; but, with your permission, I'll sit down." And he walks into the parlor, followed by the flower-girl and

her guardian, and confidently, though unasked, takes a seat.

The evident terror with which contact with the police is regarded by Louise and Auguste is perfectly natural to people engaged in what Maurice guesses them to be. The usual questions of a court of justice as to occupation, birth, education, previous residence, etc., would be all sources of peril both to them and their plot. Maurice has expected this terror, and hopes to get a good deal closer to them by soothing it, removing its cause, and playing the general friend of the family. During this the cat, who has come in ahead of the chevalier, has ensconced himself upon the lap of the old German woman, who pays but little attention to all this, dividing her time between knitting a pair of coarse woolen stockings, and caressing the beast that purrs and yawns, and licks her wrinkled face.

De Verney now continues: "It was to avoid this very annoyance to a young lady like Mademoiselle Louise—to whom the publicity of appearing as a witness in a court of justice, especially in such a case, where her youth and beauty might attract the attention and comments of the press—that I intruded upon you to-night!"

As de Verney emphasizes the "youth and beauty" part of his oration by a glance at the young lady, he gets a sensation. He had not particularly noticed her costume when she ran out into the hall, the lamp burning but dimly; now in the lighted room it catches his eye.

Louise, no more the peasant-girl of the afternoon, is like a woman of the world. Her dress, though but a simple white muslin, is made in the fashion of that day, giving a glimpse of a superb pair of shoulders and round dimpled arms, very white and fair to look upon. Her whole figure has more the contours of a graceful woman than of an undeveloped girl. Her face, with its anxious eyes—for it has again that peculiar expression Maurice first caught upon it—is older than that of the morning. De Verney is now sure that she is at least twenty-two.

He would probably give more time to the study before him, did not Auguste, who has been standing leaning

surlily against the door, now break out : " Well, why don't you tell us what you are going to do for this young and beautiful lady, Mister Fine-Gentleman ? "

Louise raises her hand to Lieber in an entreating way, but Maurice astonishes him by replying quite sharply : " I have done something ! "

" What ? "

This is a little cry from both Louise and the Alsacian.

" *This !* Knowing how unpleasant it would be for you to appear in court, I have made arrangements with the judge for a *commissionaire de police* to come here to-night and take your testimony. He will only ask you both a few simple questions, as my evidence and identification of the rascal were perfect and complete ! "

A little sigh of relief from Louise and a kind of snort of pleasure from the Alsacian come to Maurice's ears. A moment after, Lieber says : " Thanks, *mein* friend ! " and would embrace him in the German way.

But de Verney artfully avoids this and murmurs : " It is nothing. I had no trouble whatever. The judge dare not offend me ! "

At this the girl gives him a smile ; then, catching his eye, hers seem to droop, and a blush steals over her cheeks, that have been pale. Maurice, who is close to her now, notes something he has been trying to discover : Louise's light, half-curly hair, that has great lumps of red color in it under the lamp-light, shows no traces of darkening near the roots, and has too fresh a luster and glossy an appearance to owe its tint to anything but nature. The chevalier gives almost a little shudder. Those peculiar eyes, joined to this extraordinary hair in women, denote those whose smile is fatal, and whose love is death !—the eyes and hair of Cleopatra, Semiramis, Lucretia Borgia, and Delilah.

He would now no more trust this woman than he would that awful serpent of Martinique, whose skin is yellow and whose eyes are flame, and who twines itself in the ripening bananas that victims may mistake it for the luscious fruit and, plucking it, die. He could never love this woman.

Might he not pity her and save her ?

He gazes at her ; she is very young. A little pity comes into his heart ; he feels his weakness.

She looks up once more into his eyes. She is ravishingly beautiful ; he pities her a little more.

At twenty-seven Maurice de Verney is of too tender an age to be entirely great.

BOOK II.

THE MASKED WRESTLER OF PARIS.

CHAPTER VIII.

"L'HOMME MASQUÉ WILL MEET ALL COMERS."

PERHAPS her eyes would speak to him again, did not at that moment the sound of the garden gate being opened come to their ears.

Maurice remarks: "The commissionaire the judge promised me," and goes out to meet the man.

His supposition is correct. Theophile Mussan has fulfilled his promise. After a few words with the official, who is apparently a routine individual, Maurice brings him in, introduces him to Lieber and Louise, and sits down with some interest to listen to their answers to the questions that will be asked them.

The commissionaire wipes his spectacles, takes pen and ink, and, the usual formalities being gone through with, selects Louise for his first witness. Perhaps her beauty attracts him; he rubs his spectacles several times during her examination.

She gives her name as Louise Marguerite Tourney; the place of her birth as Paris, stating that her father was a Frenchman, her mother was German; that both are dead.

This agrees with the parentage of the chemist of the Rue de Maubeuge, whom he suspects to be her brother, Maurice remembers.

"Your age?" queries the officer.

"Twenty!" comes straight at him.

If she has told the truth, the chevalier has misjudged this by two years—it is unimportant, however.

In answer to the question whether she has lived all her life in France, Louise states that "she had remained in Paris till fifteen, then her mother had taken her to Germany, her father having died when she was a child. She had lived in Heidelberg, and then in Strasbourg since her mother's death three years ago; that her guardian, Auguste Lieber, had brought her to Paris with him a month ago. In Germany she had been a teacher in a girl's school—here in Paris she sells flowers at the Jardin d'Acclimatation. Following her business she had often been annoyed by the attentions of men who called themselves gentlemen, but to-day had been cruelly insulted by some low fellow. Here she gives a decidedly unflattering description of Monsieur Microbe and his interview with her, stating that her guardian, Auguste Lieber, had come up and driven the scoundrel away; but that Monsieur de Verney, driving past, had seen the occurrence and, had he got to her in time, would, she has no doubt, have protected her. While saying this last, the young lady favors the chevalier with several grateful glances.

"That will be sufficient, I think," says the commissionaire. "I never met a young woman who gave her evidence more concisely and clearly."

He then questions the Alsacian, some portions of whose evidence astonish Maurice.

The questions and answers run as follows:

"Your name?"

"Auguste Lieber."

"Your age?"

"Thirty-one."

"Your place of birth?"

"Sarnbourg, in Alsace."

"Any profession?"

"Yes; I am professor of gymnastics—was instructor at Strasbourg until a month ago," says Lieber, quite proudly.

"And since that time?"

"I have been in Paris, and am at present a florist. Have a kiosk on the Boulevard Montmartre."

"Why did you come to Paris?"

At this question, Maurice opens his ears. Monsieur Lieber will have some difficulty in answering this, he thinks.

"I came here," says the Alsacian, "*to meet and throw the Masked Wrestler of Paris!* I came here a month ago. Since then, he has not been advertised to appear. I had nothing to do—I found a chance to purchase this garden and business. I bought them to give my mother an opportunity to spend her spare time cultivating roses, for which she has a passion." He indicates with a wave of his hand the old woman who has during all this been quietly knitting, not appearing to speak French, though sometimes exchanging a word or two in the German *patois* of Alsace with her son.

"Then you came here to encounter the masked man, the one who wrestles at the salle Le Peletier?" asks the commissionaire, with a raise of his eyebrows.

"Certainly!"

"Are you not aware that he has vanquished everybody?" remarks the officer, who is a Parisian, and has that pride which believes in celebrities local over all other celebrities. And this masked man, who it was rumored was at least a duke, and who had tumbled all other wrestlers over like men of wood, was the latest Parisian divinity. Therefore, the official mutters, "And you dare to meet *him?*"

Catching this, Lieber goes into a great rage. "Dare to meet him!" he cries. "I who have thrown every man who has faced me. I, Auguste Lieber, the man with the iron legs, who broke the collar-bone of the Polish champion at Warsaw, and left the Hungarian giant senseless in the ring at Vienna? Dare to meet him!" he screams. "Why, the fellow is in disguise because I came here. HE DOES NOT DARE TO PUT ON HIS MASK!"

During this conversation, after a start of astonishment, there has been a very curious look upon de Verney's face. Once or twice he has nearly laughed.

"And that is the reason you are staying here?"

"Just so! I am now waiting for that man who dare not show his face, and I am going to down him!—DOWN HIM!" cries the Alsacian, in a savage voice.

"After that you will leave Paris?"

" Perhaps no, perhaps yes. The flower business pays very well."

Then the questions come again upon the crime of Microbe.

Auguste gives the same general description of the occurrence as Louise.

" It will not be necessary for either you or your guardian to come to court to-morrow," says the commissionaire to Louise, rising. " This evidence is perfectly convincing, and Le Chevalier de Verney has already identified the accused."

Mr. Lieber is so pleased that his interrogation is finished that he returns : " If all officials were as considerate in their questions as you, monsieur, there would be fewer criminals in the world." And after this rather ambiguous remark, takes the commissionaire with him into his kitchen to give him a glass of beer. The old woman, followed by the cat, goes with them to help them, and Maurice, having declined this hospitality, finds himself alone with Louise.

The moment this happens, the girl's eyes give him a glowing glance, then droop again.

She blushes and mutters : " You—you have been very kind and considerate to me, Monsieur de Verney. I should have dreaded the scandal and publicity of an examination in court. Thank you—thank you ! " Emphasized by another flash of her eyes, and a fair hand outstretched to his, what man could fail to respond? He presses the pretty fingers to his lips, after the manner of his country, and returns a French compliment, " For you I would do much more."

As his lips touch her hand, it seems to tremble in his and linger for one moment—the next, is suddenly drawn away. The girl's face is pale ; it's Maurice who is blushing now.

He turns the conversation by asking, " Your guardian, Auguste Lieber, then dares to meet the masked wrestler? " —and discovers a new trait in the young lady he is studying.

" Dares to meet him ? " she echoes indignantly, with a flash of anger in her face. " Dares to meet him ? I should despise him if he did not. I love strong men, and Auguste is strong enough—for anything ! " This last is said proudly. There is a tender look in her eyes, as if

Lieber's physique had produced some occult effect upon her mind. How much, Maurice cannot now determine, as the Alsacian, after taking the commissionaire to the door and bidding him good-night, now returns to the parlor.

Throughout this whole interview, de Verney has had one leading thought—that is, to discover whether or not these people mean to make any attempt on the safety or life of the Prince the next day. He now imagines he has a way to determine this point and remarks, "You are both musicians?" looking at the piano and a violoncello standing near it.

"I sometimes play German songs upon that!" remarks Auguste; "and as to Louise——"

"I heard her voice as I came up the path!" interrupts Maurice, and, turning to the girl, he brings a flush of pleasure to her face by saying, "Would you and your guardian like to hear Adelina Patti to-morrow evening?"

"Oh-ah!" This is an expression of delight from Louise; but Lieber says shortly, "Go to the opera? Every dandy would be ogling the flower-girl of the Jardin d'Acclimatation. I'd have to trounce a dozen fine gentlemen to-morrow night instead of the miserable *crévé* I dragged in the ditch to-day!"

"In the amphithéâtre you would be conspicuous," remarks Maurice, "but in my box you could hear the opera and be unnoticed, if you wish to be."

"Your box? To hear Patti!" gasps the girl in a frenzy of delight.

"Certainly, I have an excellent *loge de première;* and for to-morrow evening it is at the disposal of you and your guardian. Mademoiselle Patti sings in *Somnambula!*"

"You will accompany us?" asks the girl, with an eagerness that makes Mr. Lieber scowl.

"By no means," returns Maurice, who has planned an occupation for that occasion which would surprise both his listeners if they but guessed it. "I have too much regard for the good name of one placed as you unfortunately are. I may look at you from the orchestra, but your guardian and yourself will be alone to-morrow night—do you accept?"

He waits with some anxiety for their reply. If they even seriously entertain his proposition, he imagines they

can hardly contemplate the consummation of such a crime in the morning and the enjoyment of the opera in the evening ; besides, the Prince Imperial dead, no matter for what cause, there would be no opera for any one in Paris to listen to the night of his death.

The easy method in which these conspirators consider the affair relieves him. The girl looks at her guardian and says : " I think I could manage a dress that would not be conspicuous for its inappropriateness ! "

" Devil doubt you ! " returns the Alsacian, with a grin. " You'd be sure to look well enough ! " He gives her a chuck under the chin, and says with a plaintive grimace, " But me——"

" Why, Auguste, you have the evening suit you wore at the gymnasium on exhibition nights. It looks very nice now, and Gretchen can sponge it up to-morrow," cries Louise. " Say yes, quick," and makes a little *moue* in his face that is half entreaty, half caress.

" All right ! " returns Lieber. " We'll say done ! You can leave the tickets at my kiosk ! " and he gives de Verney the address of the place, not being aware that Maurice is very well acquainted with his flower-stand already.

With this the Alsacian calls in German to his mother to get out his best clothes, and goes up-stairs to be sure they can be made acceptable for grand opera.

Maurice is now pretty certain that to-morrow is not their time for action. A moment after he has another chance to confirm this. The girl says suddenly : " You are connected with the army, Monsieur de Verney. There is to be a review of the Guards to-morrow at the Terrain de Saint James. The Emperor will be there—will——" Here she hesitates a little and then goes on determinedly : " Will not the Prince Imperial be there with him ? "

This speech sets Maurice to thinking in a hurry. As aide-de-camp to the general commanding Paris, he has to be at that review himself, and has orders to that effect, though to-day's adventures have driven military duty for the present out of his head.

These people are watching the movements of the Prince so very carefully, they have thought of something that had not before occurred to him.

He considers a moment and then says: "The Prince is sure to be there. The Emperor loses no opportunity of making his army love his son and heir."

Then he gives a sigh of relief. He is now sure of the Prince's safety for another day—one day more in which to obtain sufficient proof to warrant his seizing upon these conspirators.

"Then my little royal patron will not be at the Jardin d'Acclimatation to-morrow?" returns Louise, with the suspicion of a pout.

"Ah! You are anxious for the Prince's face again—*ma petite*, you are jealous of the army?" laughs de Verney, giving her a glance to indicate that, as representative of the army, he is also jealous of the Prince Imperial.

Miss Louise understands this glance, for she cries: "How foolish you are! the Prince is but thirteen——"

"And I but twenty-seven. We are both boys, and I am jealous of my royal rival—you give him too many smiles, Louise!"

This is said in a half-brutal and quite familiar way—calling the girl by her Christian name—one utterly opposed to Maurice's usual manner, which is very considerate and respectful to all women; but de Verney has turned the matter over in his mind, and has concluded from the remark that she liked strong men—men who conquered everything; that she is one of those women who are more impressed by lions than lambs. He knows but one ground will appear reasonable for his continuing this acquaintance, and building up an intimacy that will enable him to supervise her actions for the next few days—that is, that he loves her—and reasons: If I make an attack upon the affections of this most artful woman, I must do so in the way that'll please her most. If she likes the brute, I can play the brute to mademoiselle's satisfaction, if not to my own.

This familiarity does not seem to annoy the girl. She looks pleased, then laughs, "Jealous—already, Maurice! And you represent the army? Under what rank, monsieur—lieutenant?"

"Commandant! Tenth Chasseurs d'Afrique, and aide-de-camp to the general commanding Paris."

"A–ah!" There is a peculiar tone in mademoiselle's

voice, and she returns, " Then you are in a position to do me a favor ! "

" What is it ? "

After a moment's thought, she replies. " Auguste's mother wishes to visit her friends in Germany. It is a great deal of trouble for poor people like us to give the time from our daily work necessary to obtain a passport. Could you obtain one for Madame Lieber and—and servant to visit Germany ? I'll give you the written descriptions."

For a second Maurice hesitates, but before Louise can say pleadingly, though archly, the " please " that is on her lips, he returns, " Certainly. On what day do you wish it ? "

" Thursday will be early enough," says the girl lightly. " I can depend on you ? "

" Entirely. A passport for Germany for Madame Lieber—— "

" And *servant!* Don't forget the SERVANT ! Gretchen is too old to travel alone."

" Shall I also get a passport for the cat ? " laughs de Verney.

" No ! " cries Louise, with a burst of merriment. " Lamla will be disconsolate ; but Lamla stays at home. "

" Gretchen will also be inconsolable, but—— "

He gets no further, for there comes a very savage and frightened voice from up-stairs, crying " Louise ! LOUISE ! "

" What do you want ? " the girl shouts back in an angry tone. She isn't pleased to be interrupted at this moment.

" What have you done with my cigarette case ? " is the answer.

This is a very commonplace question, but the effect on the girl is tremendous. She turns ghastly pale and almost staggers, then conquers herself by a great effort and says, apologetically :

" You needn't be astonished at my fright, Monsieur de Verney. My guardian is a domestic tyrant, and—and I don't like to be scolded. Excuse me ! " With this she runs up-stairs.

Maurice can hear them whispering in an angry but frightened altercation. He even thinks that he distin-

guishes the down-trodden Louise calling the "domestic tyrant" "Fool! Idiot! Beer-head!" though he is not quite sure.

While he listens, he cogitates, "Why are both Lieber and the flower-girl so agitated at the disappearance of a cigarette case? Cigarette cases are cheap!" Here he gives a start of joy. He remembers that Auguste gave the chemist of the Rue de Maubeuge a cigarette paper. This paper was an addition to his cipher letters that rendered them intelligible. What if, for the sake of security, the Alsacian had only given enough to disclose to Hermann Margo a *portion* of his instructions; that the balance may yet be given; probably immediately before Hermann is to make use of them—perhaps on the very day they intend to consummate their plot. Does the lost cigarette case contain the final additions to the cipher letter held by the German chemist? If he could but find them and read them by aid of his own copy of the cipher letters!

These thoughts are interrupted by a cry of joy upstairs.

Louise comes running down and laughs, "He had taken off his every-day coat to try on his evening clothes. He felt in the pocket of his dress-coat and, of course, did not find his cigarette case there—and became frigh—angry!"

A moment after, Lieber strolls down with a sheepish look on his face smoking a cigarette, apparently to show why he wanted his case in such a hurry. He gazes rather pointedly at the clock, which indicates the hour of ten, and mutters, "Gardeners and poor people get up early, and go to bed early also!"

At this pointed hint, de Verney rises to depart. He bids Louise good-night, saying, "I shall not forget the passport——"

"Nor the tickets for your box at the opera also, I hope, Monsieur Maurice," and, coming to the front door with him, the girl holds out her hand.

"Certainly not," returns de Verney, raising the hand to his lips, and emphasizing his words with a pressure upon the girl's digits.

"*Au revoir!* I wish you could see me dressed like a lady; I wish you could see me to-morrow night at the

opera." This last is almost a whisper, though Lieber, as if to speed the parting guest, has walked half-way down to his gate.

"Why, Louise, any lady might envy you your toilet now!" whispers Maurice into the girl's ear, giving her hand, which curiously has not been withdrawn, another and tighter squeeze. But at this moment he catches the gleam in her dark eyes and notes the peculiar tint in her hair. With a sudden impulse he almost starts from her, and is delighted the girl doesn't notice it, for he has trodden upon the tail of the cat that has been seated upon the step gazing romantically at the moon, and perhaps awaiting the hour of some midnight rendezvous. The unfortunate Lamla raises such a yell at this assault upon his tail that Lieber turns and cries: "Is the beast beginning again to-night?" and the old woman, opening a small dormer-window up-stairs, puts out her night-capped head and cries in German, "*Mein Gott!* who's killing my poor cat, my Lamla?"

The beast gives a few athletic bounds, and scratches with his claws into the vines that climb over the rustic porch, and flies to his beloved mistress's protection. Louise, with a little malicious laugh, kisses her hand to Maurice and runs up-stairs also, while that young gentleman strolls down the path to Mr. Lieber, who has thrown away his cigarette after one or two contemptuous whiffs, and produced and lighted a black, generous-looking meerschaum pipe of exaggerated size, and odor potent enough to destroy the perfume of the rose-bushes of his garden.

"You don't find smoking injure your condition or wind?" says Maurice casually.

"Pough! Not a bit!"

"Nor cigarettes?"

"Pshaw! I never smoke them—at least, rather seldom," returns the Alsacian, as if he suddenly remembered that he was smoking one of these little life-destroyers only a moment before, and had been raising the house to find his poison-carrier within the last five minutes.

"I presume you keep in pretty fair condition?"

"Yes—I never let myself grow very stale," remarks Auguste, using a technical term; "I take a good hour's exercise every morning. You see, that masked wrestler

might by accident hear that I've left town and appear again. I want to be ready for that chap—they say he is a cursed aristocrat!" and Lieber grinds his teeth over the last word in a very savage way.

"Then you intend to meet him?" murmurs Maurice, preparing to light a cigar.

"Just let him give me the chance, that's all!" cries Auguste. "I want to show that snob who wears a mask, because he is ashamed to be known as a wrestler, and thus insults every professional he meets in the arena, that bread-and-sausage and beer 'll make as good muscle as *omelet soufflé*, *pâté de foie gras*, and champagne—curse him!"

"Ah! I see you are not afraid of him," says Maurice pleasantly.

"Afraid of HIM!" mutters Lieber, and a moment after says proudly, "Would you like to feel of my arm?" —extending an enormous limb into the moonlight.

"I should be delighted," returns de Verney, and he examines the mass of Alsacian brawn quite critically, uttering an ejaculation of admiration.

"Now, just grip my iron legs," says Auguste, pleased at the sensation he is creating.

This Maurice does, so carefully and so thoroughly that the Alsacian suddenly says: "You must know something of wrestling yourself, Monsieur de Verney? You have investigated all the important points that make a man formidable at the Greco-Roman."

"Yes, I'm something of an amateur," replies Maurice, "but let me get at your lifting power"; and he examines the brawny muscles of the back and loins of the athlete, several times testing their elasticity. Then he remarks, "For a man of your weight you are very active."

"Ain't I!" cries out Lieber delighted; "I could do up that French aristocrat as I did the little dandy of to-day. But you, de Verney"—he has become quite familiar and friendly now to Maurice—"you pick out the weak points of a man as well as his good ones. I soon guessed that when you were putting your hands over me. You know a few wrinkles in wrestling. Eh, my boy?"

"Possibly," says Maurice meditatively; "I hardly think you could jump over that fence now. Could you?"

"Look!" With this the Alsacian gives a tremendous

bound and goes over into the street, but just touches the palings, whereupon Maurice gives a prolonged and meditative whistle.

"That was a terrific jump you picked out for me," says Auguste, grinning. "Try it yourself."

"No, thank you. I'm hardly up to your form, Monsieur Lieber," returned de Verney. "I'll walk out of the gate," which he does, and bids his host good-by on the sidewalk after a few parting words.

As Auguste goes up the walk to his house, Maurice looks after him, and makes this curious remark to himself: "I BELIEVE I COULD DO THE TRICK SURE, BUT NOT VERY EASILY."

Here the cab-driver, whom he has kept waiting, cuts in: "Double *pourboire* double speed, Monsieur de Verney?"

Maurice glances at his watch—it is a quarter past ten—then says shortly: "Home by twenty minutes to eleven, and twenty francs!"

He springs in, and the twenty francs make the four miles take but twenty minutes.

While he has driven rapidly he has thought rapidly, and settled these things in his mind:

"What evidence have I on which to cause the arrest of these people now? The copy of some letters, that may mean anything until I get the rest of the cipher. The curious actions of a chemist, a profession that numbers a good many cranks in its ranks, and the flirtation of a pretty flower-girl with a Prince. I must have more. The boy is safe for to-morrow; Auguste Lieber has kept some part of the cipher back—it is not yet delivered. That part I must get without frightening him. If he doesn't put it out of his hands to-morrow morning, I'll find it at his house or on his person. His house I'll search to-morrow afternoon; if not there, he carries it with him, and I'll have a try for it, God willing, to-morrow night."

By this time he is at the Rue d'Hautville, and, telling the cab to wait, he bolts up-stairs. Here he finds Monsieur Microbe waiting for him. That young man would burst into his tale of what he has learned from Miss Rose at the *Variétés*, but Maurice cries "Wait!" sits hurriedly down, and writes six lines; then seals the letter and says:

"Microbe, take the cab at the door and drive as fast as you can to the salle in the Rue le Peletier."

"Ah! Les Arènes!"

"Yes."

"That's where the masked——"

"Take this to the manager," interrupts Maurice, sternly. "The performance is not yet out. Give it to him in person—understand me—*in person.*"

"And if he should not be there?"

"Follow him till you find him, and don't let me see you till you have delivered that letter."

"All right!" cries Microbe, and bolts off on his errand.

In five minutes he is at *Les Arènes*, where an exhibition of boxing, fencing, and such sports is being given that evening to a half-filled house. He fortunately finds the manager in and gives him the note, then walks to the Café le Peletier near by and gets a glass of wine. He takes a little time over this, for wine is high in a first-class café, and Monsieur Microbe likes to get the worth of his money in elbowing the fashionable gentlemen about him.

In the midst of this he hears a yell from the street that makes him leave his wine unfinished. He comes quickly out; there is now quite a crowd in front of *Les Arènes*, who are uttering cries of excitement and joy. The lost is found! The wonder and pride of Paris is to be seen again! The management are putting up a placard stating that to-morrow evening, April 22d, "L'HOMME MASQUÉ WILL MEET ALL COMERS!"

This is enough for Microbe. He bolts off with his news, and, getting to the Rue d'Hautville, comes in on Maurice, who is quietly smoking, and cries: "*L'homme Masqué* to-morrow night! Do you think there is any chance you will have anything for me to do to-morrow night?"

"Lots!" says Maurice, stoutly.

"A-ah!" This is a sigh of dejection from Microbe.

"But still," laughs de Verney, "you may be able to see the masked wrestler."

"Then can I go out and buy a ticket now?" This is said very pleadingly by the young detective.

"Not just at present. Tell me what you learned from Rose at the *Variétés!*"

"Oh! she knows very little," says Microbe; "Lieber bought the shop and garden from a florist named Chabot, who has gone to America. He has attended to business regularly. I pumped her and found that she had noticed the German who bought the roses and left the letters. They were for some one living with Auguste Lieber. He brought one in the morning and, an hour afterward, came to get it back again, but Mr. Lieber had already taken it. When he found he could not recover his first letter he left a second one, which Lieber also carried away."

"But how about Hermann's getting three white roses for three successive days, and to-day receiving a red, indicating a message was to be given him?" asks de Verney.

"Oh! on the days he bought a white rose-bud, Mr. Lieber had only made up white roses into *boutonnières*. He could get no other at that kiosk. To-day, however, Mr. Lieber had only had red *boutonnières* for sale, so he got a red one. How very natural! The girl who sold 'em never dropped to the game."

"How very cunning!" cries Maurice. "That athlete is not the brain of this affair; it's Louise." Then he meditates, "I wonder if she'll beat me?"

A moment after, Mr. Microbe suggests, "If monsieur would not want me for a few minutes, I'd like to go out and buy a ticket for the gallery at the *salle Les Arènes* for to-morrow night. They'll be all gone soon."

"No need of that. I will take care you get in. I shall have need of you there!" mutters Maurice.

"I do not understand!"

"Of course not; but"—here de Verney's look and voice become commanding and intense—"as you are a living man, swear to me that you'll reveal to no other living being what I tell you to-night!"

"I—monsieur!" utters Microbe, a little frightened, for the chevalier's manner is very impressive.

"For the purposes of this business, I am compelled to make a revelation to you—SWEAR, AS YOU ARE A MAN, TO KEEP MY SECRET!"

"I—I swear!" cries Microbe, almost in desperation; for Maurice has strode up to him and seized him by the arm. Then he shrieks, "Great Lord, how strong you

are! You are crushing the bone!" This last is a writhing yell.

"I beg your pardon—I forgot," mutters de Verney. "But now I must tell you something."

He whispers in Microbe's ear.

Then Microbe turns very pale, and, after gasping out in a dazed, unbelieving sort of way, "You?—Impossible!" sinks into a chair.

A moment after the chevalier goes quietly on, and explains to him the precise part he wishes his assistant to take in to-morrow's doings.

But during all this the little fellow's eyes regard him with an amazed admiration. Once, when the chevalier's back is turned, he goes slyly up to him and feels reverentially his leg. And, Maurice looking over his shoulder at him, he mutters very humbly, "I—I beg your pardon, but I—I could not believe my ears."

"Then believe my legs," says de Verney, with a smile.

"Ah, that I do! No one could doubt them. Good Lord! They're hard as a jimmy and as elastic as burglars' saws!" Then Microbe gives a sudden laugh and cries, "Give Lieber one good one for me, please—one good one for my Mabille suit!"

"I'll consider your request," says Maurice; "and now good-night! Don't forget you are to be tried and convicted to-morrow morning at ten. Report to me here at eleven!" and so dismisses Microbe.

That young man goes down the stairs slowly and thoughtfully, both dazed and stunned. But, getting out into the street, the fresh air seems to revive him; his Gallic spirits return to him; he looks up at the windows of de Verney, gives a long whistle, and chuckles, "Isn't he a devil of a fellow!"

With this he skips along to the Rue le Peletier, and finds the crowd there much larger; for the manager of the Arènes, as soon as he has glanced over the note delivered by Monsieur Microbe, has cried out joyously, "Our Patti has come again—for nothing!" For it means to him about the same thing as if that queen of song had offered her services to the manager of Les Italiens gratis and without charge—his profit will be equally magnificent.

So he sends his messengers everywhere with the bills.

Paris is soon placarded ; for a stock of posters of this craze of the day is always kept on hand ; his eccentric announcements being sudden and unexpected. Several of these being immediately clapped up in front of the house, the audience coming out from the performance catch sight of them, give a yell of excitement, turn round to the ticket-office, fall into line, and man and boy buy seats for the sight they love so well.

A moment after the crowd is swelled by the swallow-tailed gentry, the news having got to the clubs and cafés ; among them young Higgins, who flies out of that room in the Café le Peletier, so much patronized by trans-atlantic visitors that the waiters nick-name it the Café Américain.

He stands shivering in the line with no overcoat on for over two hours before he gets to the box-office and procures his *loge;* but goes away happy in his purchase, for in the street he is offered double his money for it ; though he has to almost fight his way out ; for by this time the crowd has changed into a mob.

And now, the opera being out, carriage after carriage leaves its portals, and comes bowling along for the Arènes ; for the belles of the Faubourgs St. Honoré and Saint Germain know that their physical idol, that tremendous animal whose lithe beauties bring spasms of delight and love to their beating hearts, will again make them crazy with one night of wild, delirious, excited bliss.

Their carriages jostle with those of the Quartier Brèda, and while Madame la Comtesse de Merrincourt cries hysterically, with tears of excited joy in her eyes, to her friend, the Baroness de Brissac, " Thank heaven ! we're sure of our seats ! I shall see him again ! Look ! The count has just succeeded in buying a *loge* for a hundred *louis;*" the English cocotte " Skittles " howls out from her coupé, " 'Arry, put up my diamonds ; I'll 'ave another look at 'im if I go without my breakfast ! "

And so the Parisian world of that epoch, in which pleasure was its god and excitement its heaven, surges and roars around the *salle Les Arènes*, for its lost love has come back to it once more.

" L'HOMME MASQUÉ WILL MEET ALL COMERS ! "

CHAPTER IX.

THE BEAR'S NEST IN THE BOIS DE BOULOGNE.

THE next morning at six de Verney is called by François, and goes through about the same peculiar exercises as he did the day before, save that he doubles their amount and tests each and every muscle of his wondrous body as to both its strength and elasticity. Noting these performances, his servant, who has seen the placards announcing the appearance of *L'homme Masqué*, remarks, "One would think from your care, my master, that you had thoughts of meeting this masked fellow yourself."

"Pish!" says Maurice, rather impatiently.

"Why not give him a try, sir?—I'd like to see you. I believe you could throw him!" continues François, anxious for his master's glory.

"That would be impossible for *me*," mutters de Verney. Then he says, with a little laugh, "It might be a pretty even thing between us though, François!"

"I'd bet you could down him," answers the old servant. "Just give him a tumble to-night. I hear *L'homme Masqué* is getting conceited!"

"Perhaps he is," says Maurice. "Pride often goes before a *fall!*" and leaving his servant grinning at his remark he sits down to a light breakfast.

Before this is finished, an answer comes to a letter he had written the night before to his general, granting him leave of absence from to-day's parade.

He has now his day before him, and can use it as he has arranged in his mind the previous evening. He looks over his mail. Among the letters is one from the chemist to whom he had written the previous evening. It is short and to the point, as follows:

ÉCOLE DES MINES, PARIS, April 21st, 1868.

My dear Chevalier:

Your note of this evening is at hand.

You ask for the properties of carbonic-acid gas as a poison. As I know your healthy mind would never contemplate suicide, I give them with pleasure.

Carbonic acid is, at natural temperature and pressure, a gas containing one equivalent of carbon and two of oxygen (CO_2, old nota-

tion). It is odorless, colorless, tasteless, and has the peculiar property of being heavier than air, consequently will lie in the bottoms of old wells, shafts, etc., and cause death to people descending them, being a poison when breathed by man or animals. Its action is partly positive as a narcotic, and partly negative, as it will not support life.

Its weight being greater than the atmosphere permits it to remain in deep places when undisturbable, though the general law of the diffusion of gases would gradually cause it to mingle with the air even in shafts and caves, etc. However, as you value your life, don't descend into any place filled with it—as the first breath would doubtless cause you to faint; and five minutes after, you would be dead beyond a question.

If you have any investigation of this kind to make, lower a lighted candle first. If it burns, you need have no fear; if it is extinguished, the same gas that causes death to flame and light will cause death to humanity.

Suicide by burning charcoal in a closed room is produced by this gas; though this death is gradual, because it takes time to fill the room thoroughly with it. If the chamber were thoroughly charged with gas, death would be very rapid. Carbonic acid is generated by many common causes in nature; and in the arts is mostly produced by the action of some strong acid upon carbonate of lime (marble), which liberates the gas, which in the form of soda-water you enjoy in your stomach; but in the lungs would cause your death. If you want any additional particulars, write me, and you can rely upon an answer from,

Your sincere friend,
ALFRED LEFEVRE.

To Le Chevalier de Verney,
No. 33 Rue d'Hautville,
Paris.

Maurice looks rather serious after reading this, then gives a sudden whistle and orders François to call a cab; for he has concluded that it is just as well for him to see the hiding-place of the Prince, and whether it is in a *well*, *shaft*, or *hole in the ground*.

While François is doing this, the officers on watch at the Rue de Maubeuge and flower kiosk come in and report that during the night nothing has happened at either of these places, and the German chemist has not returned to his lodging. This is about what de Verney has expected. He lets these men go. Regnier, Marcillac, and Jolly have come in for their day's instructions. Jolly is ordered to watch the flower-stand, and in case Hermann again appears, to follow him at once. Marcillac is detailed to keep his eyes on August Lieber, to see if he delivers a paper or communication to any one. In

that case Marcillac is to follow the person getting the communication.

Monsieur Regnier he retains for a special service in the afternoon.

These details settled, it is eight o'clock in the morning.

He drives off toward the Jardin d'Acclimatation, but, passing along the Boulevard Montmartre, chances to see Monsieur Lieber at his flower kiosk, and thinks he would like to talk to that gentleman for a minute.

As he comes up to him and offers him the promised tickets for his box at this night's opera, Auguste puts them quickly aside and cries, "No opera for me to-night —see!" He points to one of the wrestler's posters and mutters: "That chap has come out of hiding at last. To-night I'll show the cussed aristocrat what one of the people will do with his dainty flesh and noble bones!"

"Then mademoiselle will not go either?"

"Not she! She loves strength! She'd have never loved——" He stops himself here, and goes on more carefully, "Louise is coming to-night to see me slap the masked fellow to the dust. You will come with me to-night? You, I hope, will be in the ring with me!"

At this Maurice can't help giving a little start.

Whereupon the Alsacian cries, "Don't be afraid! I wouldn't let that masked scoundrel hurt you. I, Auguste Lieber, thought you might like to be my second. I would have protected you; for I will blow that man, who dare not let me see his face, away—like that—POUGH!" Here he gives a tremendous puff with his mighty lungs, brings his jaws together with a snap that makes the girl Rose, who is standing near, give a startled yell, and says smilingly, "He is gone!"

"I cannot be your second, though I hope to see you in the ring very much, Monsieur Lieber," returns Maurice, quite cordially.

"Don't doubt me!" cries Auguste; "I would not miss him for my life. To-day I am sure to meet him. If it had been to-morrow——" Here he checks himself again, for joy has made Monsieur Lieber very enthusiastic this morning, and says, "Will you not have a *boutonnière?*"

"Yes," returns Maurice, "but I would like a colored one. You have only white ones this morning."

"Ah ! To-day red roses are so scarce in my garden that I have made up only white ones for the gentlemen," murmurs the Alsacian.

"Then a white one will do," says de Verney, pinning one in his coat, and driving on his way rejoicing ; for white roses, he knows, mean that the German chemist may expect no addition to his cipher—consequently Mr. Lieber still has the last of it in his possession. Red roses about his establishment would have been regarded by Maurice with anxiety.

In quite an easy frame of mind he turns over in his head a plan for his afternoon search at the house in the Rue des Vignes ; and, arriving at the Jardin d'Acclimatation, leaves his *voiture* and strolls along the road to the Madrid till he comes to where the imperial party stood the afternoon before. There are not many people about now—it is too early, and most of the children that have come out this morning are in the garden looking at the kangaroos eat, or the monkeys play.

This suits him exactly ; he wishes to make his examination unnoticed.

He takes his departure from the point where the Prince received his prize, going into the thickets and trees at the place from which the boy issued, and makes his search very carefully, looking here, there, everywhere he can imagine a child could find a place of seclusion or hiding. None seem to him sufficiently secure or difficult of discovery to permit him for a moment to think it is the hiding-place that has been proof against a half-hour's search. He has devoted almost an hour to this business, when he impatiently thinks : "Either that boy Conneau was a fool for not finding the Prince, or I've not yet seen the royal retiring-place." A moment after he mutters : "I must find the spot ; it is absolutely necessary that I should."

And with this, he goes regularly and systematically over the ground once more, giving himself bounds in which he knows the boy must have found concealment. But this proves still unsuccessful.

He has just thought, "I wonder if I couldn't get a hint from one of the gardeners or workmen in the park," and

has turned his eyes about, looking for one of them, when suddenly, from a neighboring thicket of shrubs, he hears a fresh, childish voice crying excitedly:

"Papa! papa! call Ivan away! He's found a curious place, and will go in! Perhaps it's a bear's nest, and the bear'll eat him up! Down, Ivan! down! Papa, call him; he's acting horribly!"

Disappointed as he is, Maurice can't help a grin at the idea of a bear's nest in the Bois de Boulogne.

A moment after he gives a start.

Probably under any circumstances he would have looked, as well as "papa." The voice, which is apparently that of a little girl, is soft, liquid, and attractive; but with his search in mind, any "curious place" has in itself interest for him. He forces his way through a thickly-grown plantation of young trees and shrubs, covered with the green leaves and new buds of spring, and, after a few steps, comes to a little path, on one side of which is a bank of earth and stones covered with rock-ivy, pampas-grass, and wild-flowers. Through these, a little girl, who has parted them with her hands, is gazing apparently right into the mound. Beside her stands a huge Siberian wolf-hound, with hanging-out tongue and wagging tail, tearing up the earth with his claws, and only restrained, by the hand his young mistress has upon his collar, from jumping somewhere. The exquisite costume and picturesque attitude of the child and her dumb companion make Maurice pause, in almost fear that his coming will disturb the group.

As he does so, a kindly hand is laid upon his shoulder, and a familiar voice says: "De Verney, my boy, if that sight is a pretty one to you, how should it look to me, the fairy's father?"

"As a little nearer to heaven than I ever expect to get, general," replies Maurice, turning and grasping the old gentleman's hand that is outstretched to him; for he has recognized the voice as that of Count Lapuschkin, a general in the Russian service, whom de Verney has met so often in the last year that he regards him as a friend rather than as an acquaintance; for the count, though all of sixty years of age, has that geniality which endears him to young men.

The old man, who has been panting a little from the

exertion of following his daughter's light steps—for he has a stiff leg and several wounds, reminiscences of the Crimea and the charge of the six hundred—slips his arm into de Verney's, and they walk up to the child, who is too much interested in what she is gazing at, to give an eye to their approach; though she calls out, "Quick, papa! or Ivan will jump in, and the bear may eat him; he smells something in there!" and, with one little hand thrown around the dog's shaggy neck, she uses all her force trying to restrain him.

One thing now strikes Maurice forcibly: that is, the thorough disinterestedness and courage of the child; she has fears for her four-footed companion, but none for herself.

"Down, dog!" says the general, in so kindly a tone that the hound looks round at him and wags his tail; but, seeing something in his master's eye that suggests prompt obedience, immediately drops upon the grass; and the little girl, with her hand on his big head, stands waiting to receive them.

While she does so, Maurice takes a second look at her; and, young as she is, she gives him a sensation that many a belle at the imperial balls would have been happy to have produced upon the unimpressionable chevalier.

The child's first general effect upon him is, that she is pretty; the second is one that makes him mutter, "Great heavens! a few years and what a glorious being she will be!"

From a sort of day-dream of the girl's future loveliness, he is aroused by the general's voice saying, "Maurice, this is my little daughter Ora; Ora, salute my friend, Le Chevalier de Verney."

"Oh!" replies the child, apparently forgetting the bear on seeing him, "I know Monsieur de Verney very well already, though I did not know his name; and—" here she gives him her hand—"and I like him very much!"

"You know me, little countess?" asks Maurice.

"Yes; and, now you and papa are here, I'm not afraid of the bear!" and a great pair of honest, trusting, blue eyes are raised to his, sparkling with innocent admiration.

"Ha-ah! been having a flirtation, eh?" laughs the general.

Here the little girl astounds de Verney. She says "No!" promptly; and then, slowly and reproachfully, "He wouldn't look at me!"

"When did I see you?" asks the chevalier.

"You—you didn't see me!" remarks Ora, with a little pout. "That was the trouble; and I always looked at you when we met you in the Bois, and said to Vassalissa, 'There is the handsome gentleman who drives his horses so beautifully.' I have admired you for over a year, and you—you never looked at me." There is indignant reproach in the blue eyes, though their fire is veiled by a teary mist. Then she suddenly cries, "Papa, this is the gentleman!" pulls her father's head down to hers and whispers eagerly in his ear.

After listening with forced gravity a moment, General Lapuschkin bursts into a roar of laughter, upon which the young lady gives him a wounded glance; then turns her back on both gentlemen, and placing her hand upon the dog's head, says, "You never make fun of me, do you, Ivan, though I am little, and won't let you fight with bears?"

So the beast and his caressing mistress stand gazing once more through the plants and vines into the bank of rocks and earth, while Alexis Lapuschkin bows to his daughter and says, "Mademoiselle, I ask your pardon; I had no idea the affair was so serious; but, were you older, you would walk further from me and blush very deeply when I deliver your message to this young gentleman."

With this he leads the astonished Maurice a few steps away and whispers to him: "My daughter has several times, after her rides in the Bois, informed me that she was in love with a gentleman. She now tells me that you are the man she so honored!"

"Honored and delighted both!" utters Maurice, more seriously than might be expected; for the innocent *naïveté*, united with the fairy-like beauty of the little girl, has made an impression on him greater than even he guesses.

He walks toward the child, and bowing says, "Mademoiselle, your regard would make any man very happy—me especially so!"

The blue eyes gaze into his.

Ora cries, "I know you mean it. Oh, I'm so glad!" and, running to him, astonishes both her elders; for she now says very seriously and impressively, "Just wait till I grow up!" and takes possession of de Verney's hand as if it already were her property.

Upon this her father remarks, rather pointedly and perhaps a little sternly, "Then what will poor Dimitri do?"

These words produce an astonishing effect upon the child. Her eyes flash with rage; then she gives a cry of almost despair, which changes into convulsive sobs. Before the general can take her in his arms to console her, Ora, after one long, reproachful look at him, runs away in a passion of tears to the seclusion of a neighboring thicket. The dog bounds after her, apparently to comfort her, and Lapuschkin and de Verney are alone.

The expression on the general's face is serious and somewhat annoyed.

In answer to the inquiring glance of Maurice, he mutters, "I presume a family matter can hardly interest you, but my little daughter as an infant was betrothed to Dimitri Menchikoff, at that time a boy of fourteen. It was the wish of her mother, who is now dead, and one of those arrangements common in the great families of Russia, by which we keep our prestige and power. Now Ora is a girl of ten, and Dimitri a man of twenty-two, and she loathes, despises, and hates him."

Maurice has seen this young man at the clubs and on the race-course sufficiently to know enough of him and his character to be sure the instinct of the little girl is right; for the Prince Dimitri Menchikoff was already noted in Paris for his desperate play at cards, notorious betting on horses, libertinage with women, and general beastly, brutal cruelty to every man, woman, and child beneath him, though polishedly polite to his equals and cringing to his superiors.

He was a man who swore to his mistress that he loved her as his life one week, and passed her by, starving in the streets, with a smiling scoff, the next; who in the *salons* of St. Petersburg proclaimed that the Czar's ukase liberating the serfs was the glory of Russia, and then went home and, because the polish on his boots was not to his liking, cruelly flogged his valet so newly liber-

ated that the poor wretch did not know the rights that freedom gave him.

Thinking of this fellow's giant size, brutal instincts, and cold, fishy eyes, de Verney—looking at the exquisite child, a few years from now, in the first blush of her beauty and bloom of her womanly goodness, to be delivered over to the tender mercies of this ogre, and under the name of wife to become his slave—cannot restrain a shudder. If she suffers now, what will she suffer then?

Noticing this, Lapuschkin remarks, "You also fear for her, Monsieur de Verney?"

"Very much," replies Maurice shortly, for he hates to contemplate the affair.

"So do I," says the general; "and, if my child continues in the same mind in regard to it when she is older, I shall break off the affair; though, I presume, I shall have some opposition to encounter. In fact, it is on this business that I return to Russia to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" echoes Maurice. There is a sorrow in his voice that astonishes him.

"Yes; all my arrangements are made. But I see the cloud has passed away!" and the general calls, "Ora! come and show Monsieur de Verney what you have found this morning!" For, like all childhood's sorrows, this one of the little girl's has been short-lived, and she is now romping with Ivan as if there was no Dimitri Menchikoff in the world.

"Oh! you want to see the bear's hiding-place?" she cries; and with the word "hiding-place" Maurice comes back from contemplating the fate of the girl, to that of the boy upon whom he has staked his own.

"Yes—exceedingly!" he returns, in a tone of interest that pleases Miss Ora.

"Then I'll show it to you; but papa hardly cares for bears' nests, and I don't think I'll let him look at it!" she says meditatively; then runs to the mound, into which the dog is again trying to dig with his claws.

"Now for your bear, little countess!" laughs Maurice; and, stepping to her side, he pushes his hand first through the trailing vines, and then through a small crevice, into a hole in the rocky ground that is apparently much larger, for, though he gropes about to the full length of his arm, he cannot feel the sides.

The hound snuffs eagerly beside him and pokes his nose into this crevice also, as if jealous of him, till they both get jammed into the hole together.

The dog growls, on which Ora cries: "Has the bear got you? or is it only a wolf? Ivan can eat up a wolf by himself. Nikolai, our huntsman at Tula, told me so. Why, you're as eager as the dog, Monsieur de Verney!" and the little girl laughs; for Maurice has suddenly become convinced this is the Prince's hiding-place, and his actions show it.

He withdraws his hand and runs around to the other side of the mound, and after some rooting and digging finds a handle to something, lifts that something up, and discloses to the light of day a little shaft, perhaps seven feet deep and six feet square, that is used by the park gardeners as a receptacle for their tools, and, in their artistic and ingenious French fashion, has been covered over and concealed from general view by the mound of rocks that are made pleasing to the eye by green vines, creepers, shrubs, and wild-flowers.

A few tools left in it prove its use, the remainder having been taken out for the day's work, probably early in the morning. A little ladder leads into it.

Maurice, running lightly down this, picks up a single faded rose-bud, and feels sure it once was in the Prince's buttonhole, and this is the hiding-place of the imperial infant.

While doing so, both the general and his daughter look down at him.

The elder says, "Quite an artistic tool-house."

The younger says, "Where's Ivan's bear?" for the dog is still sniffing eagerly, and it is difficult to prevent his jumping down after de Verney.

"I've no doubt this is Ivan's bear!" remarks Maurice, with a smile, looking at the hound, who is now licking his chops wistfully; and holding up the lunch-basket of the workmen, which gives out an appetizing odor. "The dog smelled this. Don't you give the poor fellow enough to eat?"

"The idea!" cries Ora. "Ivan is always hungry, though we give him plenty; don't we, good doggie?" and she pets the brute in a half apologetic manner, and nestles her fair curls in his shaggy neck.

"The beast has the jaws and stomach of the wolf that he pursues; and, faith! if he were famished, he'd eat us up quite as quickly," says the general, while de Verney ascends the ladder and replaces everything with great care just as he found it.

At which the little girl opens her eyes, and cries: "Why do you do all that?"

"Because—because," returns the chevalier suddenly, "the old bear might come back and find her nest disturbed, and be frightened, and take her cubs, and they all sleep out at night and catch cold."

Thereupon the child claps her hands and says: "How thoughtful you are for the poor bear! I'll help you," and the two play together like children, and obliterate all traces of their visit and Ivan's claws.

As they turn away, the old general says, tapping Maurice on the shoulder, "You take a great deal of trouble to amuse my little daughter; monsieur, you have a good heart"; and the veteran's eyes have tears in them as he watches his lovely girl, in innocence, youth, and joy, race with her dog down the green lanes and over the morning dew and the spring wild-flowers of that beautiful park.

De Verney, following the general's glance, now for the first time fully appreciates the child before him, for she is in full action.

She is dressed as a princess—as, indeed, her father's great wealth and the enormous estates she is heir to, being an only child, warrant—and with a coquettish little hat on her head and her body a mass of white ermine and silver-fox furs, save where the short skirts of childhood show limbs that, in their silk stockings and pretty French boots, are even now fairy-like in their grace and beauty, and promise in the development of womanhood a figure that will be worthy of her face—which is as strong a simile as comes to de Verney's mind as he looks upon her.

So they all come down to the count's equipage that, with a great show of flunkies and liveries, is near the Jardin d'Acclimatation; for a rich boyard always keeps up a style and display, as much for the honor of his country as for his own; and the Lapuschkins are very rich, even among their own great compatriots, the Demidoffs, Gortschakoffs, etc.

Here they are met by a young girl of fifteen. She has comely features of the peasant class, and a pair of calm, dogged, fearless, yet enduring eyes—a legacy from ancestors who have been serfs for centuries.

The count cries to her in a pleasant voice, "Ha, Vassilissa, why have you followed us? Could you not live two hours without your mistress?"

At this, Ora says: "I hope not, for I love her. This is my foster-sister, Vassilissa Petrona, Monsieur de Verney."

The girl makes him a rustic courtesy, then turns to her master, and, making obeisance, says: "Little father, this letter came from the new governess you engaged yesterday, after you had left. I thought you might like to see it at once. I like to walk, it's only two miles, and I hope you are not angry."

"Certainly not," says the general, taking the note, and, after looking it over, gives a disgusted sniff and mutters, "How unfortunate!" After a moment's communing with himself, he says: "De Verney, I wonder if you could help me in this matter; you have a large acquaintance in the Faubourg Saint Germain?"

"Yes, lots of cousins, uncles, and aunts—most of them very cold to me, now that I am in favor with the Emperor," answers Maurice.

"Then perhaps you can do what I wish," mutters Lapuschkin, and, leading the young man a few steps away from the girls, he says: "Yesterday I engaged a governess for Ora; I am going to our estates in Tula, and require a woman capable of developing the mind of my child as well as teaching her the accomplishments considered necessary for a young lady of her rank. To-day the person I engaged, and for whom I made all arrangements, obtained passport, etc., writes that her mother is too ill for her to leave her for the present. Do you know of any gentlewoman who would fill this position, and who would be willing to accept a home with us in Russia and any reasonable remuneration she might ask?"

"You go away to-morrow?"

"Yes; in the afternoon, by the half-past three train, *via* Cologne and Frankfort."

"Then I'll do the best I can for you in that time.

Couldn't I send the lady on after you?" says Maurice; "you'll have to wait in St. Petersburg."

"Papa! won't you take me for a last look at my pet funny monkey?" calls Ora; "I want to bid him good-by."

"Very well, then," remarks Lapuschkin, "you'll do what you can in the governess line? I should not have spoken to many young men on such a subject; but you—I have a respect for you. Won't you come with us into the garden?"

"Oh, please, Monsieur Maurice, you shall feed my pet monkey!" cries Ora, taking his hand to lead him to the entrance.

He would like to accept the invitation, but, glancing at his watch, de Verney gives a start. It is now eleven. He is behind his time-table for this day's work, and dare wait no longer.

He excuses himself from the little lady, who says pleadingly, "I hope you've not tired of me already. I haven't known you to speak to very long, but I like you very much. We've been such good play-fellows!"

For Maurice has that peculiar, gentle way and frank manner that endears him to women, children, and the lower animals who have instinct.

To this her father remarks: "Ora, you must not detain the chevalier; he has much business of his own and some of mine to attend to, and will, I hope, see us later in the day at my hotel, No. 137 Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré," handing Maurice his card.

"I will call," mutters de Verney, raising his hat, and watching the veteran leading his little daughter away with a care that indicates every thought of his old life is wrapped up in her young one.

A moment after he reflects that he has but little time to-day for the general's service, and stepping quickly after them overtakes the party.

"If you could remain a few days longer, I am sure I could find a person suitable for you, count!" he says, and gets an astonishing answer.

The old gentleman replies: "I wish I could get out of town to-night—to-morrow I shall be ashamed of myself!"

"Indeed! you surprise me. Why?"

"Why!" cries the general, breaking out into a rage;

"that cursed nephew of mine, Dimitri Menchikoff, is going to make an ass of himself to-night by struggling with that French idiot who wrestles in a mask ! Though perhaps, if he gets his head knocked off, it might be best for everybody. However, you'll do what you can for me to-day, won't you, de Verney ?" and he gives him a kindly glance and shake of the hand.

Then the Russian party enter the garden, leaving Maurice biting his lip and gazing after them in a half-laughing, half-astounded sort of way.

CHAPTER X.

LAMLA.

A MOMENT after, he mutters, "Pish ! I believe Lapuschkin is half right. To-night shall be my last !" Then he gives a little smile and continues, "I know now how sensible people regard me !" calls his cab, and drives rapidly back to his apartments.

Getting there, he seizes upon the letter from his chemical friend, and reads it carefully over once more, and after a little says, "Ora's bear's nest is just the place for this carbonic-acid gas, especially with the lid drawn over it"; then thinks very hard, and suddenly cries, "I believe I have it !" but a moment after mutters dejectedly, "This is all conjecture—all hypothesis—all guesswork. I must—I will have proofs that will convince a judge and convict these people. I'll have them to-day !"

He is interrupted here by the entrance of François, who, with a grin, reports that Monsieur Microbe is in waiting.

"Let him come in at once," cries Maurice, and, a moment after, that volatile young man enters briskly, and says cheerfully, "I am ready for duty, Monsieur de Verney."

"Ah ! you've been before the judge, and convicted ?"

"Yes, sir."

"And sentenced ?"

"Severely ! I got three months with hard labor, and

worked out my time in three minutes. They no sooner opened the doors of Mazas to me, than I got out in a hurry; I feared that the turnkeys might think it a mistake, and keep me for further orders."

"Is that your prison dress? I should not have known you," remarks Maurice; for Microbe, the dashing dandy of yesterday, is to-day as fresh, cheeky, and impudent a young butcher-boy as can be seen in Paris.

He has on an apron covered with blood, and is suggestive of a bull-dog upon the seat on the cart outside.

"No; but as Lieber and the flower-girl will learn by the papers that I'm in prison, it's just as well that, in case they should happen to see me, their eyes should not tell them that I'm still at large."

"Quite correct; I should have ordered a disguise myself, if you had not; but now, being ready, you can take charge of an affair in which I need your aid at once." And with this de Verney gives the little fellow some instructions that make his eyes roll; then sends him away whistling, but dazed and astonished.

"How long do you think it'll be before you can do it?" calls Maurice after him.

"I don't know, sir," says Microbe, in a melancholy voice; "perhaps *never*, if Lieber catches me!"

"Pough! he'll never recognize you; and you must be at the Porte de Passy not later than three o'clock. It's now twelve—you can do it."

"I will do it, if the cat's got normal propensities. You say the beast's name is Lamp——"

"Lamla!" corrects de Verney.

"All right! Lamla shall be ours, if beef'll do it!" cries Microbe, who goes down the stairs, forcing the cat's name into his memory by forcing it into doggerel that he hums to a popular opera-bouffe air, something after the following:

"*Lamla! eh, Lamla! cher petit Lamla!*
Un morceau de bœuf, attraper le chat!"

Catching this extraordinary ditty, de Verney gives a grin, and mutters, "Great Lord! to think that my plans depend upon a cat's appetite; however, the digestions of these animals are pretty generally reliable, thank heaven!"

The cat's dinner reminds him of his own ; for, though he usually dines at seven, to-day he makes mid-day his dinner-hour, for his evening meal will be a Spartan one.

This being finished, and Regnier, whom he has sent on this errand, coming in and reporting that the Emperor will surely be accompanied by his son to the review in the afternoon, Maurice quietly enjoys his cigar and rests till about two, when he drives out to the Jardin d'Acclimatation again.

The place is not so crowded as it was the day before ; the review on the Terrain de St. James, hardly half a mile distant, has drawn away most of the sight-seers, the flower-girl probably among the number. He asks a few casual questions, and learns that Louise has not as yet been here. Even while doing so, he catches a glimpse of her pretty figure coming from the direction of the ground upon which the Prince and his friends played yesterday.

She, however, does not come quite to the entrance of the garden, but, apparently allured by the stream of carriages and pedestrians moving along the Madrid road to the reviewing-ground, mingles with them, and is lost to his view.

Curious to know what can have taken the girl so much out of her way, when she knows the object of her plot will by no chance visit the place to-day ; Maurice, taking care Louise has passed from view, strolls up through the trees and thickets to the scene of his morning's adventure, and sees with some concern three beautiful red roses among the wild-flowers on the mound. For a moment he thinks them natural ; but a little inspection proves that they have been placed there, probably in the last fifteen or twenty minutes ; for, though cut flowers, they have not as yet begun to droop in the hot afternoon sun. He immediately opens the receptacle, and very cautiously descends into it. Everything is as it was, save that the workmen's lunch-basket is now empty. Coming out, he goes away meditative and puzzled, though he takes care to leave the flowers as he found them.

Soon after this he strolls to the review, hoping to get some clew to this mystery from the flower-girl herself ; but the crowd is so great he cannot get near her, though

he can hear the people cheer, and can see her, from a distance, present the gallant boy, who has observed her and galloped to her, a beautiful bunch of roses.

He mutters : " Giving him flowers, and yet about to do to death the pretty child she smiles on.—The cursed hypocrite ! " This business hardens his heart to her, and makes him capable of playing the scene out with her that he does later in the afternoon.

As it is, he now remains only long enough to be sure that the Prince returns home with his father immediately after the review. This is settled by the imperial party galloping off shortly after three o'clock.

As soon as he sees this, Maurice walks back to the Jardin d'Acclimatation, where he has left his equipage, and on the crowded road, among other venders of drinks for the thirsty, meets an old, dilapidated, and near-sighted coco-vender, who is screaming out his cry a little louder and more wildly than the rest.

His attention is called to this personage by the remark of a girl near him : " I don't want your coco, you old *crévé*, but I'll give you five centimes for your beautiful rose."

This is answered by a shake of the head.

Whereupon the young lady remarks : " Do you hope to catch the girls with it, ancient swell of the Quartier Maubert ? "

Maurice gives a little laugh at this, for the coco-vender's costume indicates that he probably has bought his clothes from rag-pickers, though his apron is clean and white. The next moment he looks closely after the man, for it has struck him that the rose he wears is the same in color and size as the three placed upon the hiding-spot of the Prince.

Maurice thinks he would like another look at the spot, and, turning out of the road, after a little walk, arrives there, to find but *two* roses left, and that the place has evidently been examined by some one else. He lights a match and drops it into the hole ; it burns brightly ; the place is still safe to descend. He does so again, and it is as he left it.

Had he time, he would now follow the coco-vender; but there is little chance of his finding him in the crowd. His watch shows half-past three ; if de Verney

is going to follow his projected plan of action, it is now time he met Monsieur Microbe at the Porte de Passy. With a sigh after the lost merchant of drinks, he goes rapidly to the garden, gets into his carriage, and speeds away for his place of rendezvous with his assistant.

He reaches the Porte de Passy, and can hardly refrain from an exclamation of annoyance; for he can nowhere see young Microbe, whom he has told to be here at three o'clock. It is now four, and he fears he has failed in the errand he gave him to do. He drives out of the Bois, and has gone slowly for a few yards, when he is startled by Microbe's original ditty coming to his ears :

" Lamla ! eh, Lamla ! cher petit Lamla !
Un morceau de bœuf, attraper le chat !"

He turns suddenly round, and a moment after mutters to himself : " *Mon Dieu !* but the fellow is an artist ; " for, as near the gate as such vehicles are permitted, stands a little natty butcher-cart, drawn by a Normandy pony, and upon the seat is young Ravel, the butcher boy, with a grin on his countenance.

As Maurice approaches him, Monsieur Microbe calls out cheerily : " I've got him ! "

" Up there ! " says Maurice, grimly pointing to a string of sausages dangling from the cart.

" No ; I purchased those to frighten the old woman," laughs Ravel. Then he cries : " Do you recognize Lamla's voice ? " and pokes a bag at his feet, from which come dismal feline sounds.

" No," replies de Verney ; " but I am acquainted by sight with Mr. Lamla. Let's look at him; for I must be sure."

" All right ! " returns the butcher boy ; and, after a moment's struggle and some scratching, the gray head and green eyes of Lamla make their appearance.

In the light these latter turn red, for the cat is evidently in a fearful rage at the indignities he has suffered.

" How did you catch him ? " says Maurice, with a laugh.

" I angled for him with this fish-hook and line and a little piece of beef," remarks Ravel. " I worked to get the beast all of an hour, throwing my bait over the back garden hedge, in mortal terror that giant Auguste would

turn up unexpected, as he did last night. Thank Heaven! I've at last vanquished one member of the infernal Lieber family!"

This last he emphasizes with a poke at the bag containing the unfortunate Lamla.

"There's no danger of Auguste being home before six o'clock. Regnier reported him as at the Gymnasium, training for the event to-night; but at the best, we've no time to lose. Is Regnier on watch? I ordered him here. Drive on after me!" replies Maurice.

And the two move along to the entrance of the Rue des Vignes, where de Verney leaves his cab, he having used a hired turn-out to-day.

He walks alongside of the butcher-cart, and questions eagerly:

"Did the old lady Lieber see you?"

"No!"

"Does she suspect anything?"

"I hardly think so; but from her actions she was getting very anxious about the cat."

"What makes you think that?"

"Well, she walked into the garden every few minutes, and at last called out, 'Lamla!'"

"Ah!"

"Then the cat mewed, and I was afraid she'd hear it, and came away. But here's Regnier, who can tell you the latest."

"The old woman is quite excited," that officer explains. "She has left the house entirely, and is walking about the garden. She is now near her front gate."

"Now is your chance! Microbe, do just as I told you," says Maurice; for by this time they have come near to the little street that runs from the Rue des Vignes past the home of Lieber, the florist.

"All right!" cries Ravel. "Watch the fun!"

So it comes to pass that Madame Lieber's anxious eyes, a few moments after this, catch sight of a butcher cart coming rapidly past her front gate. She pays little attention to this, being wholly engrossed in the search for her lost darling. But, as the cart gets opposite to her, she hears a hideous feline yell that sounds familiar, and, looking up, sees, with mingled rage and joy, her missing Lamla, held by a savage butcher boy.

"*Gott in Himmel!* that is my cat! Give him me at once!" she screams, in German.

But the boy, apparently not understanding her language, gives two or three jeering yells in reply, and drives rapidly on.

Not waiting even for her bonnet, with mingled cries of endearment for Lamla and shouts of "Stop him! stop thief!" in her *patois*, mixed with sundry German oaths, the old woman runs in pursuit, the cart at one moment raising her hopes by stopping until she nearly comes up to it, then the boy deriding her, laughing in her face, and driving on with fiendish yells.

So they pass out of sight, the tears running down the old woman's wrinkled and dusty cheeks by this time, and wild imprecations flying from her mouth at every breath; for the butcher-cart and string of dangling sausages have put frightful ideas in Madame Lieber's head.

"Now see that I'm not interrupted without warning," mutters Maurice to Regnier; and walks quickly up the path, and into the open front door.

The parlor of Lieber's house is as it was the night before. If the paper he wants is anywhere about, it is either in Auguste's or the girl's bedroom. He passes quickly up-stairs and enters upon his work; though he mutters, "A nice employment this for Maurice de Verney! Jove! I feel like a burglar"—still he goes about his search rapidly and systematically.

The second story of the house is divided into a hall and two bedrooms, both opening from it, and connected by a door between them. Both have several closets. He goes first into the rear apartment. This apparently belongs to Auguste, as it has none of those adornments of which all women, even of the middle classes, contrive to have some. There are no articles of feminine apparel; the room contains several pairs of foils and sabers, boxing-gloves, clubs, and the implements a professional athlete would have about him.

There are two large closets connected with this chamber. These Maurice immediately inspects, making a thorough examination of the clothes in them, even to their linings, but obtains no result. He of course keeps a special lookout for the cigarette case mentioned the

night before, feeling pretty sure this is the receptacle of the paper needed to complete the cipher. A systematic search of this whole room gives him but one thing of any value, and that is a short letter telling Lieber to draw upon some German society of which he is apparently a member, and which for some reason or other gives him a pension or endowment.

This Maurice at present dare not keep, though he makes a hurried memorandum of the leading points in it.

All this has taken some time; he now hurries to the other bedroom. There can be no doubt it is the chamber of Louise; but did ever the room of a working-girl present such a picture of refinement, almost luxury? The windows are draped with lace curtains; the bed, with its neat white counterpane and pillows trimmed with insertion, is almost covered with an evening dress, laid out for the opera this evening, the girl having apparently made these preparations before she knew that Lieber would to-night have the opportunity, he had so longed for, of meeting the masked wrestler.

This toilet is a mass of fleecy muslin of the finest kind, and, trimmed with lace as it is, would make the girl the beauty of the opera-house.

"Egad! I mustn't look at this; I've no time for romance now!" mutters de Verney, and proceeds with a search that he feels is almost desecration; though he forces this from his mind by the idea that she is at heart an assassin.

But let him examine as he will; there is so far nothing here that would even give rise to a suspicion, save two or three innocent household memoranda in the same handwriting as that of the cipher letters; though, curiously enough, these are all written in full German text, showing that the appearance of the Latin letters in Louise's penmanship was no matter of accident or carelessness.

These spur him on, and he continues his investigation thoroughly and carefully; replacing everything with minute inspection, so as to leave no trace of his visit behind him.

Toward the last he is rewarded by one little discovery, and that is a memorandum corresponding to the address of the letters sent the chemist Hermann at Berlin.

He now feels absolutely sure of his suspicions, and

thinks he'll find something further ; but is at last compelled to desist in despair. He hurriedly arranges everything, and looks at his watch. It is a quarter to six.

He mutters, " Great heavens ! I must get out immediately," and is moving to the door, when his heart nearly stops beating ! He hears a woman's voice in the hall below. It is that of Louise. He listens for a moment.

She is coming up-stairs.

Some people have instinct, others have reason. De Verney has both. Instinct dominates him now. He hastily scrawls on one of his cards, " Louise, I love you ! " places it on her dressing-table, and steps into a large closet.

As he does so, the door opens and the girl comes quickly in, carrying two red roses in her hand.

He has left the door of his closet slightly open, so that he can see what she does ; and, as he looks at her, reason comes to him and tells him that instinct had prompted him correctly.

There are only two logical reasons for his being where he is at this time : One, that he is in search of evidence against these conspirators (the moment they guessed such a thing, any chance of obtaining his proof would be at an end) ; the other, that he is now lured by the charms of the flower-girl, and willing to make a villain of himself at the promptings of his passion. Had he loved Louise, he could never have let her think him such a creature ; but, as he does not, he mutters to himself: " It is charming to be heroic, it is better to be successful ; " and, quieting any conscience on the matter with the thought that, against one who would plot the murder of a boy, any ruse is permissible, he stands ready, if necessary, to play the *rôle* of Don Juan in the drama before him.

While he is thinking, the girl has tossed her hat upon a chair and her roses on her dressing-table, and stood, a beautiful statue of meditation. For this summery day she is dressed in white muslin, that, unextended by the crinoline, just driven out of fashion, drapes and displays the contours of her exquisite figure as if it were a robe of Greece. But now, as he gazes, she suddenly becomes an image of despair ; a peculiar expression comes into her face, that makes it awful to look upon. She mutters, " To-morrow ! to-morrow ! " each syllable being a choking

sob, that would change into a spasm of convulsive weeping did she not fight it down and change it into a wild opera-bouffe chorus that she sings, as if it drowns thought and she were afraid to stop it; for she repeats it again and again, till, having conquered herself by music, she proceeds to the duties of the toilet, and has half let down her hair, that falls in mottled red and gold below her waist, when the chevalier hears her utter a little cry, and sees her pick up his card.

Turning this over in her hand, she seems to meditate; then gazes quickly around the room in a startled way and looks at the card again, making a very pretty and coquettish picture, de Verney thinks.

For, with the setting sun coming in the window and illumining her brilliant face, her white arm, from which the sleeve has partly fallen, holding to the light the declaration upon which she gazes, half pleased, half afraid—perhaps half tempted—Louise might be likened to Eve looking at the apple before she threw away immortal beauty for a taste of it.

Thinking this, Maurice mutters to himself: "Now, Mr. Serpent, don't forget your cunning!" steps lightly from his hiding-place, steals unobserved behind her, clasps her lithe waist with his arm, and whispers in her ear the song the serpent sang to our first sinner—"*I love you!*" and finds an Eve much more prudent than our first mother.

For a moment the startled girl turns deadly pale, and is about to cry out; next, conquering this by an effort, a deep-red blush flies over her face and neck. Then she whispers piteously: "Are *you* like—all the rest?" and, giving him one reproachful look and one deep sigh, droops her head despairingly on her bosom; and after a moment's pause mutters, "and I loved you!"

Astonished, overwhelmed with shame—for Maurice is not a man who could wantonly insult any woman, even a murderess—de Verney forgets he is acting, and stammers out: "You—you mistake, Mademoiselle Louise. I am not like all the rest."

"Mistake! is this a mistake?" she cries, turning upon him and holding up his card. "And you came here to —to cruelly insult me—when I thought you better, braver, nobler than the rest! My God! is there a true

man on earth?" and the girl pants and sobs as if in despair.

"I—mademoiselle—I!" gasps Maurice, carried off his feet by her apparent suffering; but he gets no further, for Louise grasps his arm and with white lips whispers:

"Hush!" as Lieber's heavy step is heard below.

A moment after, Auguste calls out gruffly for his mother.

"My God! he'll kill us both," gasps the girl.

"Have no fear," whispers de Verney. "I will protect you, mademoiselle, from my folly!"

"But yourself!" mutters Louise. A moment after she says, "Quick! I can arrange it," and motions Maurice to step back into the closet.

This the chevalier does, silently and quickly, as Lieber's step can be heard ascending the stairs, and the Alsacian shouts out:

"Louise, no opera *to-night!* I've news for you, Louise!"

"I'm here, Auguste!" cries the girl; and, closing the door on Maurice, she goes to meet her guardian, who is already in the hall just outside. Cautiously working the door slowly open again, de Verney, who has regained his senses now he is away from the passion and despair of Louise, contrives to hear the following:

"What do you want?" says the ward.

"First, give me a kiss for the good news I bring!" cries the guardian.

"Good news! What news?"

"First, the kiss!"

"There! What news?"

"To-night the masked wrestler has forgotten I'm in town."

"Pish! Is that your news?" says the girl, disgusted. A moment after, Maurice catches the words: "Don't do it—think of the risk!" for they are walking along the hall away from him.

Then Lieber cries out, "What risk? I'll make his bones rattle!"

"Then give it to me!" comes to him, in Louise's voice.

"Not at all! What a woman you are! It never leaves me——" And the conversation, which has gradually

grown fainter to his ears, now subsides into a murmur he cannot distinguish, for they are at the other end of the hall from Maurice; though the last words have been those that have left him in a very good temper.

A few moments after this, Lieber's steps go down the stairs, and die away in the distance. Then Louise throws open the door, and remarks: "I've sent him to look for his mother, in the back garden. Now, if you please, Monsieur Maurice, we will continue our conversation on the doorstep. It will look as if you just left the card by which you have honored me." She gives him another reproachful look, gazes at his declaration, sighs, places it in her bosom, and runs down the stairs to the front of the house, with de Verney following her and wondering at her.

At the portal, she says: "Just slip outside; it will seem as if you had but now arrived."

And the chevalier doing so, she continues:

"I am sorry we cannot use your opera-box to-night. Auguste insists that I see him conquer *l'homme masqué*. Monsieur Lieber can hardly accompany me to Les Arènes. He has tickets for a box. Will not you do me the honor to escort me this evening, monsieur—Maurice?" This last with a little *moue* of entreaty.

"I would like to accept," says de Verney, as, in truth, he would, the *moue* being very alluring; "but I have an engagement it is impossible to break."

"Impossible!—and you love me?" she mutters; and there are tears in her eyes that make Maurice disgusted with his action this afternoon, and delighted when Lieber suddenly turns the front of the house, and, seeing him, calls out suspiciously, "Ha! you are getting as regular as our dinner."

"Monsieur de Verney came," remarks Louise rapidly, "to show me this account of the punishment of the *crévé* who insulted me. It is quite funny. The villain received three months with hard labor." And, to Maurice's astonishment, this very truthful young lady produces from her pocket and reads aloud a copy of *Le Temps* of that evening, which has quite a humorous report of Monsieur Microbe's interview with the judge. In which, after various displays of wit on both sides, the official had said, "Three months with hard labor!" and the *condamné*,

with hideous effrontery, had replied: "Bet you, judge, you don't mean it."

Upon hearing this, Maurice, who sees a point in Monsieur Microbe's words that the others do not, gives way to a burst of laughter.

"You are merry, monsieur," remarks Lieber; "so am I. I'm going to have some fun with an aristocrat to-night. But we must have dinner now, and I do not find mother here to make it. Louise, you must help me. Come in and start the fire at once!"

With this, that gentleman goes into the house, giving the girl the chance for a few parting words with Maurice. She says, pointedly: "I hope your engagement for this evening will be a pleasant one," but holds out her hand to him in apparent forgiveness; and he, striving to enact his character of Lovelace, gives it a squeeze. This she returns, and murmurs: "You have forgotten the passport you promised for Madame Lieber and servant?"

"Indeed, no!" replies the chevalier; "I only promised them by to-morrow."

"And you will have them surely?"

"Yes."

"Very well—I rely on you. If you are driving to the Bois to-morrow afternoon, you can give it to me at two."

"You may rely on me to-morrow," says de Verney, with more point to his speech than he intends to give it.

As he walks down the path, he thinks: "I am not good at playing the *rôle* of villain;" and, arriving at the gate, sees Madame Lieber, worn out, weary, and dusty, make her appearance in the distance, carrying the lost Lamla in her arms.

This reminds him of Monsieur Regnier. After passing some distance along the Rue des Vignes, that officer timidly joins him.

"Why did you not signal me of the return of Mademoiselle Louise?" asks Maurice, sternly.

"I—I was looking the other way, for the old woman; and the girl was so near me before I discovered her that, if I had made any sign, she would have surely seen it."

"You did quite right, under the circumstances; my discovery, as it happened, produced good instead of harm this time—only keep your eyes about you the next! Jump in, and drive into town with me," says de Verney; for they

have come to the end of the street where he left his cab waiting.

Arriving at the Rue d'Hautville, he is met at his door by François, with a very solemn face, contorted by a grin struggling to break loose from it; who says grimly, with a peculiar gesture of his thumb toward the dining-room: "He's in the kitchen this time!"

"Who?" cries Maurice, striding into that room. But here he gets a shock: an awful caricature of a butcher-boy, his shirt torn in ribbons off his back, his dusty face clawed into long red streaks of alternate gore and skin, rises up before him and shrieks: "Look at me now! This is worse than the Mabille suit!"

After a struggle that nearly suffocates him, de Verney, with tears in his eyes, gasps: "You are killing me!" and sinks into a chair.

"Don't laugh at me!" screams Microbe. "Don't dare laugh at me! This is too horrible for mirth!" and he utters wild imprecations.

"Did he catch you again?" gasps Maurice

"No, but *she* did. The mother! She is worse than the son! Curse those Liebers!"

"Please—tell—me—all—about—it," says Maurice softly, as if in fear of letting his feelings run away with him.

"Well, I left, as you saw, the old woman in hot cry after me, and took her, through every quiet street I could find, to Auteuil, then by the Rue d'Erlanger, across the Avenue de Versailles, and down the river, giving the madame some lovely water views, as far as Bellevue—she shrieking and screaming all the way, but I encouraging her, every now and again, by letting her get almost in grabbing distance of Lamla, then jabbering at her and going on with a rush. I—I never enjoyed anything so much in my life! Having got her so far that she'd never get back in time to disturb you, I should have flung her cursed cat into the street, driven on, and ended the affair; but, idiot that I was! I thought I'd have a little more amusement—a farewell set-to with the old lady. She looked exhausted, and I let her overtake me——"

"And then?" suggests Maurice; for Microbe has suddenly paused.

"Then!" he cries. "Can't you see? I don't like to

talk about it! That old hag, instead of grabbing the cat, grabbed me; and, *mon Dieu!* look how she clawed me!" pointing to the red marks on his face. "Behold my head!" and he tears off his cap and shows Maurice a sight which sends him into convulsions; for the old lady has torn out half his hair, and her victim is now tufted in a manner wonderful to behold, and ludicrous to look upon.

"Did you not resist her?" ejaculates the chevalier, after forcing himself to calmness.

"Resist her! She's stronger than her son, and has claws of steel—the old hag! Curse the Liebers!" howls Ravel, half in rage, half in despair; for he has just caught sight of himself in a mirror. "What money could repair my beauty?"

"My poor Microbe!" murmurs Maurice. "As you say, money will not buy you a new skin. As soon as you have washed your face, I shall send you to the hospital."

"To the hospital! Am I as bad as that?" cries the young detective, jumping up. "For what?"

"*To arrange for the reception of Auguste Lieber!*" remarks de Verney, dryly. "He may need medical attendance this evening."

"Ah, God bless you! You are going to avenge me!" cries the volatile Microbe, cutting a caper. "Give him *two* to-night, Monsieur Maurice—one for my Mabille suit, and one for *his mother!*"

CHAPTER XI.

THE SALLE LES ARÈNES ON THE RUE LE PELETIER.

MICROBE goes on his errand, and Maurice glances over the reports of Messrs. Marcillac and Jolly. These are what he expected and hoped for; the German chemist has not returned to the Rue de Maubeuge, and nothing of interest has taken place at the flower kiosk. Auguste Lieber has performed his usual duties there till about two in the afternoon, and has then departed. Being followed, he has gone to a gymnasium patronized mostly by Germans; but at this place has hardly spoken to any

one, and for two hours has devoted himself to light exercises, calculated to put him in condition for the coming struggle. He has then returned to his house at Passy, apparently communicating with no one.

All this indicates he still has the paper Maurice wants; and the few words of his conversation with Louise, that de Verney's ears caught while he was in hiding, indicate he means to still keep it on his person. "It's to-night or never!" murmurs Maurice between clinched teeth, that say he has determined it shall be *to-night!*

Thinking these thoughts, after a very light meal, de Verney sits down, lazily smoking his after-dinner cigar, and looking out from his windows upon night, as it descends on Paris.

The darkness that should now come upon the city is driven off by myriads of flaming gas-lights, that make its streets and boulevards one brilliant yellow glow. The sleep that should make it quiet and silent is replaced by excited gayety; and, as the night grows older, the city becomes brighter and more joyous.

Over there, in the far-away suburbs of Grenelle and Montreuil, bloused workmen groan of hard times and lack of bread; for the building era of Baron Haussmann has now passed its zenith, and money is scarce with the handlers of bricks and mortar; and in the Quartiers Montmartre and Belleville, the red-shirts of Messieurs Rochefort and Fleurens are uttering their cries of rage at law and order, and grinding their knives and cleaning their guns for work two years from now; but here, near the grand boulevards, there is naught but mirth, joy, excitement, and brightness. Parties of students from the Quartier Latin troop through the streets, to dance at the Mabille with their grisettes, or to hear Theresa sing at the Alcazar, or to the Variétés, where Hortense Schneider is making the world a little gayer—and perchance a little more wicked—by her incomparable drolleries and naughtinesses, in some suggestive opera bouffe, some musical debauch from the genius of Offenbach.

The cafés, brilliant within, are more brilliant without this pleasant April night, making their street-seats most popular with the crowd of pleasure-seekers gathered from the four quarters of the world. The scene, made picturesque by the rich toilets of their own fair compatriots, now

becomes dotted here and there by magnificently dressed cocottes, who are pouring down from the Quartier Brèda for their evening raid upon the virtue of this city, which has so little. The streets begin to fill with carriages carrying their occupants to the theaters, opera, and places of amusement. The after-dinner click of the champagne corks in the great restaurants on the boulevards becomes more rapid; the waiters fly about the cafés more vivaciously; the remarks of the ladies have more *chic* and abandon. The absinthe hour is growing nearer. It is night in Paris—that light-hearted, laughing Paris, now running its butterfly race to Metz and Sedan, its siege by the conquering Teuton, and the fantastic horrors of its own commune; as yet happy as its absinthe-drinkers, and sparkling as its own popping champagne—on its journey to despair; this opium-dream capital, this Second Empire Paris; this Paris that we shall never see again on earth—but ah! how much we'd like to!

All day, in front of Les Arènes, on the Rue le Peletier, there has been a crowd, gradually growing larger and more excited as evening draws near. Now it is a mob of crushing, struggling human beings; for the doors have been opened, and those who have no seats secured are fighting, like Frenchmen and demons, for some point of vantage from whence they can see that small oval arena, in which to-night will appear the object of their longings, hopes, and fears. For when this unknown wrestled and conquered, with him, in kindly sympathy, wrestled and conquered all Paris who saw him—from the titled lady in the boxes, whose brilliant eyes flashed love and longing through her heavy veil, to the Paris *gamin* in the upper gallery, who had sneaked there past the ticket-taker, in the crush, and who expressed his joy with one small component part of that mighty yell, when their champion brought his man, shoulders and hip, to mother earth, that trembled with the howl above it.

And now, in this struggling mass, carriages begin to appear; some coming from the Italian opera, where their owners have listened to an act of *Sonnambula*, trembling lest they miss a little of the athletic feast, from which even the voice of Adelina Patti at her zenith cannot charm their souls! About this time, the police make

short work of the crowd who have no tickets and can't get in; for up-stairs the place is crowded to the entrances with one mass of humanity, too closely packed to do much more than gasp for breath and strain their eyes upon the ring, as if the very sawdust in it were a matter of intense and holding interest. A few of the more adventurous dispute with the little orchestra, now tuning their fiddles, the use of the minute gallery that belongs to it. From this place now issues most horrid music, a number of the performers having been bribed, by well-known *boulevardiers*, to surrender their places and instruments to them. Upon these instruments these intruders cannot play a note; consequently, the selections of Verdi, Rossini, and Offenbach, intended to enliven the evening, are produced with such barbarous, weird, and unearthly strains, that a boy in the gallery makes a mistake, and cries out, "DOWN WITH WAGNER!" Happily for the manager, the crowd do not notice this. They have no ears; this evening they have only eyes.

As for the lower circle, every standing-place in it is black with dress-coats; and the reserved boxes are filling rapidly up, for a line of carriages is now giving out half the celebrities of Paris, "*mondaine* and *demi-mondaine*"! *Madame La Duchesse*, of the Faubourg, is jostled by Cora Pearl, of the Rue du Helder; and the two squeeze past the door-keeper shoulder to shoulder, they are so eager; Dumas, the great novelist, is sandwiched with little Murteur, the critic, whom he hates and despises, and who in return hates him, because he envies him; while Mr. Bower, the great English jockey, treads on the corns of a minister of France, and mutters: "The old spavin! I took the post from 'im, decorations and hall!"

So all those who can get in, come in—Sophie de Merrincourt, whispering through her veil to Diane de Brissac: "Look at the crowd! let us bless heaven that Henri had a hundred louis and a good temper last night; otherwise we'd be like poor Madame de Belleisle, in despair and at home."

"Yes," laughs Diane; "her husband, the marquis, to keep her quiet, told her he was the masked wrestler himself, and she could see him *en famille*."

At this, the fair Sophie gives a shriek of laughter, and screams: "Mon Dieu! the marquis is seventy!"

"And paralyzed ! That's where the joke comes in !" giggles La Baronne de Brissac.

Here, Monsieur de Merrincourt, who has been depositing his overcoat at the back of the box, comes behind his wife, and says: "I caught your remarks about the hundred louis. I can afford it ; I wagered to-day at the Jockey Club one thousand with Le Prince Dimitri Menchikoff, that he would be thrown in less than twenty minutes !"

"I'll take half of that bet !" cries Sophie eagerly.

"And I the other half !" says Diane.

"No, thank you !" remarks Sophie's husband. "It's good enough to keep for myself ; but if I win, we'll have a supper at the Anglais."

"We'll have a supper anyway," says Sophie. "But who is that girl opposite us—the one in the dark dress —the one with the eyes ?"

"By Jove ! Don't you know ?" remarks her husband. "That's Louise !"

"Ah !" There is a suspicious sniff from his wife. "Louise ! and who is Louise ?"

"Louise is the flower-girl who has caught the Prince Imperial — and, I am told, your admiration, Monsieur Maurice de Verney, also !"

There is a sudden flush of annoyance on Sophie's face, and she puts up her opera-glass to take a look at the woman whose beauty she has heard about.

By this time there are many more glasses on the girl, who sits there, playing nervously with a single rose-bud she holds in her hand, so anxious that she does not notice the attention she excites—but waits and waits impatiently for what she loves to see—the sight of two strong men battling like tigers !

The crowd is now buzzing also with suppressed impatience. As a sop to them, several professional wrestlers struggle for their plaudits, and, though men of magnificent muscle, who would be favorites were it not for the mighty one of whom they are but the heralds, are looked on with indifference, almost contempt. Les deux Marseilles, *aîné* and *jeune*, contest with Lebœuf and the negro from Hayti, James le Noir—whom Mr. Higgins, from Boston, who has just entered with his American friends, irreverently calls "Black Jemmy"—and hardly gain a

plaudit during their bouts, save a few at the end, to show them the crowd is glad they are finished. All this time the boxes are filling up with gay parties, who have deserted the theaters and the operas, and even abbreviated their dinners.

But now, the last of these preliminary contests being finished, a great sigh of relief goes up all over the place, from this mass of bottled-up excitement and hermetically sealed passion. Then the crowd become silent as death.

Looking over the place, Louise sees an oval arena, between fifty and seventy-five feet long, and less than the former distance wide, surrounded by a crowd of men in evening dress, among them some whose names are still great in the history of the world, in science, art, literature, and politics; others, who were never known outside their own particular sets; some not known at all —representatives of every nationality found that day in Paris. Behind them, in the boxes, is an equal mixture of everything feminine: belles from the Faubourgs St. Honoré and St. Germain, actresses from the theaters, and cocottes from all over the world; and, above all this, one great, black mass of squeezed-in humanity, save where its color is enlivened by the red shirt of an Italian or blue blouse of a French workingman.

This arena has an entrance directly opposite the main one to the building—the one through which the contestants enter and pass out; upon this, each face in that whole multitude is turned, each eye is glued.

Up-stairs not a word is spoken; even in the boxes the most inveterate of women gabblers—those who would jabber at the opera, through the most divine sounds the genius of man ever created and the genius of woman ever expressed—are silent, save, perhaps, an occasional whisper under their breath. And so they wait.

Impressed with all this, Mr. Freddy Higgins, wishing to make an effect, remarks to one of his fair American compatriots: "By Jove, Miss Sallie, if this mania keeps in fashion, I'm going in for athletics myself!"

At which the young lady, who is eminently practical, and a graduate of Vassar, looks him over, and says: "Bet you an even hundred, Freddy, I can toss you in our parlor when we come home from the show. My sister'll see fair play."

Any answer to this is cut short by an electric ripple that goes like a wave through the audience. The ladies crowd to the front of their boxes, the men leaning eagerly over their shoulders. Even those great dames of fashion, who have, till now, kept in comparative seclusion, forget all but that they are animals, like the rest; and crowd nearer to the arena, pushing their veils aside, that their eyes may feast the easier on the tremendous animal whose sport they love to see.

A gentleman in evening dress steps to the middle of the arena, and says, in ringing tones: "L'HOMME MASQUÉ!"

A moment after, he comes in.

Stepping lightly to the center of the ring, he salutes the audience gracefully, and, save one grand sigh of recognition, they are still silent, devouring him with their eyes.

This is a pause that no one but an American girl would break. Miss Sallie leans back to young Higgins, and whispers, with a tone of disappointment: "I thought you said he wrestled in tights!"

"So he does!"

"Then I wish he'd take off his coat. I'd like to size him up."

For his face is the only part of him visible for the present; and the upper part of that is covered with a black mask, under which the eyes flash brilliantly as he turns his head, as if seeking for some one. Below that, he is completely draped by a long dark cloak, reaching nearly to his feet.

A second after this, the master of ceremonies announces that Le Prince Dimitri Menchikoff will meet *L'homme Masqué!*

This creates no astonishment, as Monsieur Dimitri has for several weeks been bragging to his intimates at clubs and cafés of his intentions, though it seems to affect the mask. He gives a start, as if he had forgotten something. A moment after, he turns with easy grace to his opponent, and bows to him as he comes in—perhaps in admiration; for Dimitri Menchikoff, half Cossack, half Tartar, is a very beautiful specimen of the physical bull, as he strides into the arena.

His figure permits no doubt of his giant strength. He

weighs, perhaps, two hundred pounds; his face has intellect, without balance; his weakest point, if he has activity, is the arrogant bearing which he displays, showing that, if thwarted long in any desire of his heart, rage will take possession of him; and a cool head to plan, as well as an agile body to execute, is necessary for this greatest of all physical contests, when played by masters of its arts and stratagems—Græco-Roman wrestling.

All this is easily apparent, as he is in the costume of the arena, and his great, burly body, nude from the waist up, is a mass of huge red muscles, that have power enough to fell ox, as well as man, properly directed.

This immensity of brawn has its effect upon the crowd; and there is some admiration in them, as they look at his points of wind and limb, and gaze at the handsome, haughty, wicked Eastern face that crowns his strong and bullish neck. Besides, they are delighted at a new face; the masked wrestler having downed all the professional athletes of that epoch, like so many ten-pins.

The judge takes his position and gives the signal.

As he does so, a great, prolonged, and mighty "A—a—ah!" comes from the assembly as from one throat. It is a cry of admiration from the men, a gasp of rapture from the women. *L'homme Masqué* has, with one graceful movement, thrown aside his cloak, and, in all his matchless manly symmetry and beauty, this, their god of the arena, now stands unveiled before their longing eyes!

At the first glance, the critic might think that, in his making, power has been sacrificed to activity; at the second, he would know that it is only concealed by it.

The athlete's head is firmly, yet lightly, placed upon a neck so easy in its motion, the wondrous strength of its firm column is veiled by its own graces. His hands are small, but both fingers and wrists show marvelous gripping power; his arms are of unusual reach and leverage. His feet, clothed in rubber sandals, have that light yet clinging step seen only in animals that bound upon their prey. His legs—in pearl-silk tights so delicate in texture that they glow with the color of the gleaming flesh that strains beneath them—are agile as those of an Olympian runner. Black-velvet trunks cover his hips and thighs, showing every grace of motion, and only partially

concealing their enormous lifting power. Around his loins a knotted scarf of red secures these ; above all this, gleaming flesh molded like a sculptor's dream of perfect manhood ; for from his waist up he is nude, and each lithe muscle and each tough sinew of his magnificent torso can be seen to play and writhe and knot itself, in conscious power and easy motion, beneath a skin as soft and dazzling white as that of an infant before disease has left its first blemish upon the human frame. His bust and chest, magnificently developed and expanded, show a capacity for oxygen that gives him staying power in times when wind is better than strength. This is how he looks to a man !

But to a woman !—this physical embodiment of all collected beauties in the sex she loves—this gleaming, glistening, moving, living counterpart of that power that makes her gentler nature trust and lean upon and worship —for the moment he looks like a deity.

And Louise, who loves strong men, mutters to herself, " Divine ! " while Miss Sallie, of practical mind, murmurs, " Good Lord ! What a wondrous animal ! "

And so it is. Has it the heart, stamina, and head to win against more than one giant in a night ? As if to test this question, this physical phenomenon is now in motion, easy, gliding, and powerful as that of a tiger that has lived his life untrammeled in the jungles of the East— as he circles round the Russian bull, who keeps facing him, with his head, bullock fashion, a little down.

Size and avoirdupois are all in favor of the latter. The Frenchman lacks nigh thirty pounds of the Russian's weight, and two or three inches of his stature. Apparently desirous of trying his relative activity, the masked man plays around his antagonist, till, finding he can avoid him with the ease a greyhound does a mastiff, to the astonishment of all he rather retreats from Dimitri ; and, seeming to be wary of his bullish power, each time the other comes to grapple with him, throws his arms away and springs beyond his reach.

" Blowed if he ain't funking ! " mutters Higgins in disgust ; and, this idea getting into the heads of the Russian contingent also, one of them, a wild-eyed Tartar from the steppes, cries out : " Finish him up ! "

Encouraged by this bad advice, Dimitri takes it, and,

rushing forward, seizes the right arm of his masked antagonist near the wrist with both his brawny hands, turning quickly to throw him over the shoulder.

No Cossack nor Tartar, no matter his strength, had ever been able to resist his power so applied; and, as he feels his antagonist leaving the ground, triumph comes to the Russian's eyes. But just at this moment something very curious happens to Dimitri: On his back, just over his kidney, there comes a short, sharp, terrible jab of the masked man's unengaged left hand; and this one wondrous little prod suddenly produces in the giant the weakness of a child.

This is a new and astounding experience for the Russian, who has not studied anatomy. He can't understand it; but can see the Frenchman's face, below the mask, has a sneer upon it. Enraged, he rushes at him once more, and locks his mighty arms about the scoffer's waist; but, ere he can exert his strength, the masked man throws his arms round his, and presses them to his side and upward, and he is once more powerless. Holding him, he tosses in Dimitri's face a mocking laugh, and throws him off, and mocks him as he stands.

Wild now with rage—for he hears an echo of this laugh among the crowd—the Russian flies foolishly to seize him in the same place again. This time his rush is met by the mask's right hand, held edgeways by his left, to give it power, which meets this rush, like a boxer's counter, straight on the Russian's larynx. Adam's apple is a tender spot, even in the Tartar race. He staggers with pain; but, while he does so, there comes a gleam of hope to Dimitri, who in distracted rage gazes at this being who mocks his agility and avoids his strength. The Frenchman has carelessly turned his left shoulder toward him. If he can seize him by the back, in that fatal hold lightness and science will be but naught. Fearing to lose this tempting chance, Dimitri throws himself with all his strength to grasp it. But as he grasps, almost within his arms, the Frenchman jumps behind him, and, as his rush carries him beyond, seizes his right arm, turns him half way round, grasps him from behind, and, aiding his own momentum with a bound that seems to shoot his victim from him, launches Dimitri upon mother earth with a thud that is heard even in the

street ! Whether his own rush made his fall the worse, or that the face of the fair child, set apart for sacrifice to this brutish giant, came into de Verney's mind, to make him her avenger and give his limbs more strength—perhaps the both combined make the fall of Dimitri a crushing one. He strikes on his right shoulder, rolls over in the dust of the arena, and lies groaning with a broken collar-bone.

De Verney's movement has been so rapid that this is all done in a flash. And now—the crowd stand staring at the mask and his victim.

For ten seconds, astounded silence !

Then a yell, that almost raises the roof, and frightens even the cab-horses standing outside ! The next moment —flowers descending on the victor, in bunches, wreaths, bouquets, and single blossoms ! for the women love him, while the men only admire.

Sophie de Merrincourt, with tears dimming her beautiful blue eyes, and making them very tender, mutters : " Oh ! if there were but one man in Paris to stand up against him till he had to fight ! Oh, my heavens ! to see his strength and beauty at a supreme moment ! "

Catching this impassioned speech, her husband goes out, biting his lip. A few minutes after he returns, and, sinking into a seat behind his wife, says : " My dear, I believe you'll have your wish. I have just seen a swarthy-looking chap who is to have a try with your divinity, and I think will give him all he wishes to attend to ; and if he breaks that masked creature's neck, I and half the men of Paris 'll be very glad of it ! "

" Glad of it ? Why ? " and Sophie questions with both tongue and eyes.

" Because, if this wrestling mania keeps up, I and half the husbands of Paris 'll have to go into the arena to keep the affections of our wives."

The lady gazes at her lord for a moment ; then an amused look comes into her eyes, and she lisps : " Do you think you'd be very fascinating like that, my Henri ? " pointing with her fan to the masked wrestler.

At this Parthian arrow, de Merrincourt mutters a suppressed curse—for he is undersized and very slightly built—then goes savagely out to the Café le Peletier, and tries to drown his rage in absinthe.

As for Louise, the terrible fall this masked man has given his adversary has filled her with a fearful terror. When the Russian is carried out, she leaves her seat, and, careless of remark, forces her way through the throng at the main entrance; then runs round by the streets to the smaller one used by contestants in the games. Opposite this door, in the street outside, is a carriage and pair, evidently waiting for the masked man—the one from which he always stepped ready for the arena. A few men, apparently employees, are standing about this entrance to Les Arènes; among them one, his face covered with sticking-plaster, who gives a start; for, did she but recognize him, he is the Microbe who she imagines is enjoying his first day of prison fare inside the walls of the Mazas. Carelessly brushing past him and Marcillac, Jolly and Regnier, who are all with him, Louise, intent on but one thing, gets to the door and demands to see Lieber. He is just coming out from a dressing-room, ready for the fray; and, hearing her voice, calls out for the door-keeper to let her in. This being done, he says, "Well, little woman, why have you left your place?"

Then she whispers in reply something that Microbe, who has come after her, cannot hear.

To this, Auguste cries: "Pish! Do you want to frighten me? I'm no cursed amateur, like that Cossack!"

And she whispers again: "I pray; I beg it of you!"

Microbe can hear this; she is excited.

Then Lieber mutters at her: "Don't talk nonsense! It is safer with me than with you in this crowd. Besides, do you want me to undress myself again, and keep this popinjay, this aristocrat, waiting for his rolling-over?"

Then she entreats again, and would reason and plead with him, and keep him from the ring; but he stops her with "Hold your tongue! Haven't you got the letters? Do you want all our eggs in one basket? Get back to your place! Don't try to make me a woman like yourself!" Then breaks from her, and bids the attendant announce him.

At this the girl gives a long sigh, goes round to the main entrance again, and, with a very pale and anxious face, resumes her seat.

During the wait between contests, the masked wrestler has resumed his cloak; and, muffled in its folds, has

seated himself nearly opposite the entrance by which his adversary will come to him. His anxiety to see who it will be seems greater than that of the spectators ; for he keeps his eye in one continuous, almost longing, look upon the place.

The master of ceremonies announces " Auguste Lieber, of Strasbourg, the man with the iron legs ! "

This peculiar appellation is greeted by the spectators with a roar of laughter ; and in it very few note the impatient joy with which the mask throws off his cloak and rises, as if the moment had come for which he was eager.

The laughter suddenly changes to a murmur of admiration ; for the giant coming in gives them all a thrill.

His burly legs, cased in black tights, well merit their appellation. Above his belt there is nothing to hide the view of his stout, grandly muscled body and sinewy arms, save the long, black hair with which they are covered, making him more bear than man, and giving to the contest about to begin a curious and weird intensity ; for it is like the combat of some fair youth against an ogre or a monster—some Theseus contending with a Periphetes.

The Alsacian holds out his hand, after the manner of professional wrestlers, to give his opponent greeting. The masked man clasps it ; and then the two, with wary eyes, move around each other, seeking for a hold.

Impatiently Lieber tries the neck; and though the white flesh reddens under his sounding pats, as he grasps the lithe column, it always wriggles from him; but de Verney, curiously enough, always seeks to grasp his adversary's waist, and over and round this his hands linger, as if searching for some hidden thing.

Doing so, he takes some awful chances ; and once, the quick, strong animal he is pawing over slips behind and seizes him with a hold that would be fatal, did not Maurice give him no time to tighten his muscles ; but, seizing like lightning his encircling arms, pushes them down, so that Lieber has no power with which to lift and throw him. Thus, struggling and writhing together, they fall to the ground, Auguste above.

With triumph in his eye, he seizes the Frenchman's neck, to wring it or to turn him over, so that both shoul-

ders and a hip may rest upon the earth, and he may win; but at this moment, as he straddles him to roll him on his back, there comes one wild, exultant shriek from the crowd!

For de Verney, noting the proper instant, has risen upon his knees, and, with the mighty power of his wondrous hips and loins, thrown the Alsacian clean over his head!

Quick as a flash Maurice is on him; but quicker yet, the trained wrestler of many bouts forms, even while in the air, a bridge; and, setting the great muscles of his neck, keeps his shoulders off the ground. So round the waist de Verney with his hands searches, pretending to struggle, but each time examining for that hidden paper. And in one of these panting pauses, as Lieber discovers that inexorable hand stealing about him, investigating for something—not trying for a fall—but making a search, the Alsacian guesses. And with that guess a shiver runs through his frame, and for a moment de Verney could make a victory. But now he knows he cannot find and steal this paper during the struggle itself; and that, to win what he desires, he must not only throw his man, but throw him INSENSIBLE!

As this comes to him, he gives Lieber a chance to escape. In a moment the Alsacian springs from under him; and the two, glaring at each other again, stand up. But at this moment Maurice makes an experiment. He suddenly reaches down, as if to grasp his opponent's feet. At this motion Auguste gives a little gasp, that tells de Verney that under Lieber's foot the paper upon which their fates depend is hid.

Knowing the fearful nature of the stake, Lieber might now wish to avoid the struggle; but curiously enough he only fights more fiercely; for like a wild flash has gone through the Alsacian's brain: "This masked man guesses our secret! *I must disable him to-night, that to-morrow's work may be done in safety!*"

Thus struggling, panting, their eyes half standing from their heads, their bodies covered with dust and sweat, their breaths coming in the short gasps of intense exertion, these men writhe, locked in each other's arms, about the arena; sometimes the lightning activity of one, sometimes the mighty muscle of the other, giving him the vantage.

Till for very want of breath they break away, and stand eying each other like wild beasts. But in this pause de Verney has time to reason. Apparently he makes a single careless motion, and Lieber, seeing a sudden chance such as wrestlers love, like lightning springs; but when Maurice tries to step behind him, as he jumps to catch him round the waist, this veteran of the arena is too wary, and seizes the right arm of the mask in his two brawny hands ; then turning, would throw him over his head ; but Maurice, as he goes, catches him by the neck with his left hand, and side by side they topple into the dust of the arena. Then comes a struggle such as the Arènes never saw before ; for these men, unknown to all that wondering crowd, are battling like tigers—not for glory, but for the fate of a conspiracy !

By a quick movement de Verney gets on top. Then, in spite of him, Lieber fights his way to his hands and knees ; and so they lie, panting, one upon the other. A moment thus, until they struggle into the position that favors Maurice's movement. The instant comes, and like a flash de Verney turns his face to Auguste's feet; and, catching him round the waist, staggers up, holding his burly body in his arms, and evading one last desperate clutch that would be foul—for Lieber cares now only for personal safety—like lightning gets into a pose that makes him a human catapult ; then, bending his superb muscles like a bow, he dashes from him head downward, half against the arena, half against its railing, the big Alsacian, who, as he strikes the timbers, utters one cry of horror, and is senseless as the ground on which he lies !

While over this comes up from men and women—who have been struggling, fighting, gasping, panting, like the combatants themselves—a yell such as was heard in ancient Rome when gladiator's sword drank gladiator's life-blood, and vestals and senators and Imperator himself cried "*Habet!* HABET !"

CHAPTER XII.

THE BASE-BALL FINGER.

AFTER this scream of the victors comes one wild cry of the vanquished. It is from Louise, who, as the Alsacian giant lies insensible in the arena, wrings her hands and struggles with the crowd already going out, to make her way to the main entrance of the building, that she may get round through the streets to the exit for the combatants, and so arrive at Lieber's side.

But this is for the present impossible. Not even the masked man himself could force a path through the human mass wedged into that passage-way, and now slowly pouring from Les Arènes. Panting, struggling, sighing with impatience, the girl is compelled to wait, and hear the remarks of those near her.

"Ah!" cries Madame de Merrincourt, who is straining her eyes to catch the last glimpse of her hero, "The masked god is assisting to carry the poor, insensible Lieber out. He made a gallant struggle!"

These words make Louise doubly anxious. She again attempts to gain the entrance, but in vain.

As she does so, the American party come out of their box; Miss Sallie and Mr. Higgins are squeezed against her, and she catches a little of their conversation.

Miss Sallie, like most American girls in Paris, insists on speaking French. She whispers excitedly to her escort: "Freddy, I'm going to know that masked man, *sure!*"

"How will you discover him, Miss Smartie?" lisps Higgins.

"My opera-glass is a small telescope. With it I dropped onto something."

"Take me into partnership," whispers Freddy, very anxiously.

"You'll promise to tell me, if you find him?"

"Yes."

"Then look about your clubs and cafés for an athlete who has a *base-ball finger*, and you'll have the man we're after!"

"You are sure?" asks Higgins.

"Certain! *L'homme Masqué* has a regular base-ball digit, like the catcher of the Red Stockings. The little finger of the right hand!"

Here the crowd brushes them away from her; but Louise, struggling still with all her might to force her way out, can't help remembering the remarks of the Yankee girl with the big opera-glass, and wonders what a base-ball finger really is.

A few minutes after this, she is in the street; and, dodging the carriages coming up for their loads, runs wildly round to the entrance for contestants. She comes breathlessly in, and goes straight to the dressing-room, from which she saw Lieber issue some three-quarters of an hour before.

Seeing a man in front of it, she says hurriedly: "I am the ward of Monsieur Lieber, who was injured in the arena to-night. How is he?"

"Still insensible," remarks the man addressed, who is an old employee of the establishment.

"My Heaven!"

"But mademoiselle need not be alarmed. There happened to be a surgeon outside; he examined him, and said he was not seriously injured."

"Thank God!" exclaims Louise. A moment after, she says more calmly: "Call a carriage; he must be removed at once!"

"That has been already done."

"Ah! They know where he lives. The Rue des Vignes!"

"I don't think Monsieur Lieber was taken there," says the man.

"Then—where to!" asks Louise, suddenly.

"To the hospital."

"Which hospital? Quick! My Heaven! Why don't you answer?" The girl beats her hands together in anxiety, and her lips grow pale with some sudden fear; an awful thought having flashed through her mind.

"Oh, you needn't be frightened about him! *L'homme Masqué* was very considerate. He had him assisted into his own carriage; helped carry him there himself. And he generally jumps in at once and drives away like mad, to avoid the curious. But, then, he never hurt any one before; and to-night he broke the Russian's collar-

bone, and smashed Lieber all up. I wonder what can have made him so savage—he is usually very gentle," gabbles the old man.

Here the girl interrupts him suddenly: "Who is this *L'homme Masqué?*"

The man hesitates.

"I'll give you a thousand francs if you'll tell me!" mutters Louise, trying to get out her pocket-book.

"Ah! If I knew that," says the old employee, with a grin, "I could make ten thousand! There are other ladies——" Then he chuckles to himself, "Another woman mad after this unknown charmer!"

Hardly noticing this last, the girl repeats, "What hospital was Lieber taken to?"

"I do not know—I will try and find out," says the man; and in half a minute returns with the news that he thinks it is Lariboisiere—that's about the nearest.

He says no more; for Louise has run hurriedly into the street, called the first cab she could find, and is now driving off to the hospital Lariboisiere as fast as a bribe can make a night-hackman make a night-horse move.

In ten minutes, she is whirled to this great monument of a woman's humanity to mankind, and, by the doctor in charge, is courteously informed that no such case has been brought into the hospital this night.

She breathlessly tells him briefly where the injury occurred, and asks him if he can suggest what would be the most likely place to which they would take Lieber, under the circumstances.

"There are a great many hospitals in Paris, and you ask me rather a difficult question," says the doctor; "but here is a list of them, and their locations." He writes hurriedly a few moments, and hands her the paper.

"Are these all?" she asks.

"No; but they are the most important."

Coming out with this list in her hand, it occurs to her to ask the hack-driver a question. She says: "You were standing near the entrance of Les Arènes when they brought the wounded wrestler out?"

"Yes, mademoiselle!"

"Which way did they drive with him?"

"Down the Rue Laffitte, to the Boulevard des Italiens."

She looks over her list. This would seem to indicate

that Lieber had most likely been driven by the Pont du Carrousel or Pont des Arts to the hospital de la Charité, across the river.

She directs the driver to hurry there. Here, disappointment again meets her. No such case has been received this night.

Her anxiety becomes such that even the night-hackman, accustomed to the miseries and horrors of the streets of a metropolis after dark, looks with pity upon her, and says : " Mademoiselle ! Why not try the Val de Grâce ? "

" Pshaw, that's a military hospital—used only by soldiers ! " Louise mutters, consulting the list given her by the physician.

" Yes, mademoiselle ; but it seemed to me that the surgeon who attended the wounded man was in uniform. Besides, the Val de Grâce is on this side of the river, and not a great distance from here."

" Very well ! " replies the girl, almost despairingly ; " drive to the Val de Grâce."

So it comes to pass, after going through the usual preliminaries of a military hospital, that here she finds Lieber.

She has made her search so rapidly that she is only half an hour behind him in time of arrival.

He is in a little, dimly-lighted room, with but a single bed in it, a thing unusual in military hospitals. A young surgeon in uniform rises from beside the Alsacian's cot, as she comes in. " I was expecting you, miss," he politely remarks, giving her a chair by the side of the bed, that she contrives to take quite calmly. " The sick man spoke of you."

" What did he say ? "

" Very little ; only that you were his ward, Louise Tourney, and would be sure to find him," mutters the surgeon, looking down in rather a shamefaced way.

Then the girl suddenly asks, " Was he delirious ? "

" Not in the least ! "

" A—a—ah ! " this a great sigh of relief. But in this sigh she pauses and trembles ; Lieber's eyes have opened and looked at her—in a horrible, despairing sort of way. His jaws and tongue have made a desperate effort to say something, but only produce a groan.

The young surgeon hastily bares the athlete's arm and

gives him a hypodermic injection; then mutters: "He has a very powerful organization; I've already given him the dose for two men, and it's not enough."

Louise looks on with trembling lips. A moment after she repeats: "He was not delirious?"

"Certainly not," replies the doctor. "There is no laceration of the brain."

"Will he be well to-morrow?" This is asked very anxiously.

"No; he must not be moved for several days."

"My God!"

"Oh, don't be alarmed!" mutters the young physician. "There are no bones broken; only a general shaking up. I happened to be passing Les Arènes, and they told me there had been an accident; so I had him brought to my ward."

Here the blood-shot eyes of the Alsacian again open and give Louise one awful, despairing glance. Lieber makes a fearful effort to say something; but the drug overcomes him, and what might have been a cry becomes a snore.

These symptoms of the Alsacian seem to make the girl very anxious. Ever since she has been in the room, her restless, fevered eyes have wandered about, noting every detail.

The athlete has been undressed. The overcoat he has been wrapped in and his wrestling costume have been tossed about, as if he had been put to bed in a hurry, and they were a secondary consideration. Belt, sandals, and tights lie on the floor. As Louise sees these last, she gives a quick gasp of anxiety.

A moment after, the surgeon rises and remarks: "I have other patients, but will return in a few minutes. You will not mind watching over Monsieur Lieber while I am gone?"

The girl gives him one joyous, thankful, almost happy look—the first one that has hope in it since she entered. He bows to her respectfully and leaves the room.

The instant his back is turned, Louise flies at the tights, and inserts her hand into their right foot. For a moment her face has an awful, panic-stricken look. She utters a little gasp of despair—her hand trembles so, she has missed it—the next moment, this becomes an almost

inarticulate cry of triumph. Her eyes become radiant—she has found a little ball of cigarette-paper. This she examines carefully in the dim light of this sick-room, utters a short sob of relief that sounds like "Safe!" and then almost faints away.

A few moments after this she staggers up from the floor, upon which she has been sitting, and getting to the brawny invalid, who now is sleeping too strongly to be awakened, encircles him with her arms; and, with kisses, caresses, and burning words of love, strives to bring sense to him, that he may hear her. Finally, despairing of this, she whispers in his ear: "To-morrow you cannot do it; but, Auguste, I will take your place!" then gives the great, dark, senseless giant, whose limbs are robbed by sleep of power and strength, more tender kisses and more burning words.

And so doing, the surgeon comes in upon her. She hurriedly turns to him, and asks, tremblingly: "Why does my—my guardian snore so?"

"That is the effect of the morphine I have given him," mutters the young physician, gazing at the floor. All through this interview, his eyes seldom look straight into the girl's, but droop as if he were ashamed of something.

"Ah! you are sure that is the proper treatment?"

He does not answer this directly, but replies: "Mademoiselle, I am a military surgeon; I know my profession."

"Of course!" returns the girl almost dreamily, rising and arranging her wraps to face the night air once more. "I can see him to-morrow?"

"Whenever you wish; but you had better come late in the afternoon. He'll hardly be awake before then."

"Not before late in the afternoon? He won't be able to speak to me—before THEN?"

"No!"

The girl, who has got almost to the door, looks helplessly at the surgeon, and staggers, as if she would fall.

He runs to her, and supports her to a chair; then orders some brandy; and, this being brought to him, forces it down her throat, saying: "You'll be sick yourself, mademoiselle. Your face is pale with anxiety; your eyes burning—feverish!"

"I shall do very well *to-morrow!*" mutters the girl,

with a significance that he does not notice. As she goes out, he escorts her to the gates of the hospital, and politely assists her into her cab, telling the driver to take her home to the Rue des Vignes, the address Louise mentions; and remarking to her, almost apologetically, as she is about to drive off: "A few years ago, mademoiselle, we would have bled your guardian, and he'd have been weak as a kitten for a month; now, a few days, and he's strong as a Hercules. What a magnificent physical development Monsieur Lieber has! But that masked man seems to be too much for anything on earth."

Here Louise astonishes the young doctor. She leans out of her carriage, and suddenly says: "You are a surgeon, and, of course, understand anatomy?"

"Of course!"

"Then, can you tell me what a '*base-ball*' finger is?"

"A WHAT?"

"A base-ball finger! I heard an American lady use that term."

"Mademoiselle, that is no anatomical expression," mutters the doctor. "But we frequently have American medical students visit this hospital. I'll ask the next one I meet. When you come to-morrow, perhaps I'll be able to answer."

"Thank you!" remarks Louise; and she drives away, with a grateful glance in her beautiful eyes, that flash out, even in the light of the burning gas-lamps of the entrance of the Val de Grâce, into the young surgeon's face, and make him ashamed of his night's work.

Filled with this idea—angry at himself—he hurries back to the room of the sleeping Lieber, and there finds de Verney and young Microbe, who have just made an examination that pleases them.

There is a smile of triumph on Maurice's brow. He is laughing quietly. The relief from the tension on his mind, for the last two days, can be seen in his countenance.

Monsieur Microbe, in a state of wonderful exhilaration, is just saying: "We've got the one on the bed," pointing to Lieber, who is still snoring, "and we'll bag the girl to-morrow, sure!"

The surgeon, coming in, catches the latter part of this remark. He looks sternly a moment at de Verney, and says: "A word with you, sir."

"With pleasure!" remarks Maurice. Then he laughs a little, and continues: "Ferron, my boy, you did the trick very neatly!"

"Yes!" mutters the latter. "But if that girl had arrived here one minute earlier, the patient would have been able to speak. As it was——"

"Lieber did not say anything to Louise?" cries Maurice, with a start.

"No! but he came very close to it. His will made a fearful struggle, but the drug won."

"All right!" returns de Verney. "Keep him under its influence until I come again!"

"I beg your pardon!" says the surgeon shortly. "No more morphine!"

"Why not?" remarks Maurice, in too good a temper to quarrel with any one at this moment. "There's no danger of its hurting him?"

"No! but morphine is not the proper treatment in such a case!" returns Ferron hotly; "and now, a word with you, monsieur. So far, I've done your bidding in this matter, Maurice de Verney, because we were friends at school, and you, as aid-de-camp of the general commanding Paris, instructed me. I've taken the senses away from this man, so he cannot protect his beautiful ward. In that I've violated my sacred duty as a physician. I'll take away his senses no more!"

"He must be kept insensible till to-morrow night!"

"Not till you swear to me, as there's a God above you, you mean no harm to that unprotected girl!"

"Not in the way you imagine, Ferron," returns Maurice; "though I think no less of you for wishing to guard her. You have only done your duty to-night to your Emperor and your country. That man"—here he points to Lieber—"is a prisoner now. Monsieur Microbe has four officers outside, who'll look after him. I do not wish to remove him yet; but he must communicate with no one. Therefore, you must keep him insensible. On my word, I cannot—I dare not—give my reasons to you to-night, though I promise you to explain the whole affair in a few days. Will you do as I ask?"

"Y-e-s!" mutters the young surgeon, after a little consideration; but a moment after cries hotly: "If you have made me do anything, Monsieur de Verney, that violates

the oath of my profession, I shall show you something you *sabreurs* sometimes forget: and that is—we doctors can use the sword, as well as the lancet!"

"I've no doubt you're equally fatal with both!" says Maurice with a grin; but here he places his arm in a kindly manner over the young physician's shoulder, and continues: "You've done me a great favor to-night. My explanation shall satisfy even your conscience, I pledge you my honor! And I think all the more of you for being jealous of your own, and your noble calling."

Next he turns and looks at the sleeping Lieber; and his face grows sad as he thinks that Cayenne or the guillotine must be this poor, brawny giant's fate.

A few moments after, Maurice passes out of the Val de Grâce, young Microbe coming down the stairs by his side, and remarking: "By Jove! Louise's beauty must have caught that saw-bones strong. He became so fiery, I thought of prescribing some of his own morphine for him!"

De Verney does not answer this. He is looking earnestly, but happily, at a piece of paper he has in his hand, which is a fac-simile of the cigarette paper Louise the flower-girl had carried away, in triumph, from this same hospital.

After giving the officers on guard over Lieber some instructions, he tells Microbe to get into the cab with him; and the two ride toward his home, in the Rue d'Hautville.

Crossing the Boulevard des Italiens, they are blocked for a moment, the street being full of carriages; and two young men from the sidewalk hail him.

"By George, de Verney! you always miss it. You should have been at Les Arènes to-night, and seen the ferocious struggle between the German giant and the masked wrestler!" cries de Frontenac to him.

"Indeed! Who won?" asks Maurice, between the puffs of his cigar, with rather ostentatious eagerness.

"Oh! *L'homme Masqué*, of course!" yells out young Higgins, who is now as happy as champagne and absinthe can make him. "I've got the drop on that enigma, too. I can recognize him now. He had a base-ball finger put on him to-night!"

As the cab drives away, de Verney mutters, with a

start: "By Jove! I broke my little finger this evening over the Russian, and forgot all about it—till now!"

Arriving at his rooms, he again forgets his hurt; for he hastily goes into his chamber and produces his copy of the three letters of the chemist Hermann. Then, with hands trembling from excited eagerness, he arranges the cipher words in them, inserting in their proper order those copied from the cigarette paper, for which this night he has struggled with the Alsacian giant in the salle Les Arènes.

After looking at this carefully for a few moments, and trying the effect of different punctuations on it, he gives a cry of triumph; for this is what he sees before him:

"MONDAYS, WEDNESDAYS, AND SATURDAYS, IN FINE WEATHER, OUR OBJECT PLAYS BETWEEN TWO AND FOUR IN THE AFTERNOON AT THE JARDIN D'ACCLIMATATION, AT HIDE AND SEEK.

"OUR OBJECT HIDES IN A HOLE USED BY THE PARK GARDENERS FOR A TOOL RECEPTACLE. KNOW PLACE BY THREE RED ROSES. WEAR ONE FOR ANSWER.

"ON RECEIPT OF THIS, WORK GAS-PLAN YOU HAVE PROPOSED. IT IS SAFEST FOR ALL. THE REST IS MINE. I SHALL NOT FAIL.

"ADDITIONAL TO FOLLOW EACH RED ROSE-BUD. COME IMMEDIATELY!"

Stepping into the parlor, where young Microbe impatiently awaits him, Maurice reads this over to the young detective, and tells him all of his discoveries this day.

"Now," he says, "Louise placed three red roses to-day upon the hiding-place of the Prince; that was the sign by which it was to be recognized. The coco-vender wore one for answer, and left two, to tell her that he had discovered and examined this hole. The coco-merchant is——"

"The chemist Hermann!" cries Microbe, suddenly and excitedly.

"Precisely!" returns Maurice. "But why did Lieber and the girl keep a copy of this portion of the cipher after delivering it? For Hermann's actions to-day showed that he had received his instructions so far."

This puts Monsieur Ravel into a meditation.

In a moment, however, de Verney suggests: "Perhaps they were afraid Hermann might lose his cigarette-paper, as he once did his cipher letters; and kept this first portion, to replace it, if necessary; not daring, in so important a matter, to trust their memories."

Here Microbe suddenly remembers, and remarks: "Yes, Louise kept a copy of those letters, and Auguste the words to complete it;" and, with this, tells Maurice of the remarks of Lieber at Les Arènes to the girl: "You've got the letters. Don't get all our eggs in one basket!"

"That probably accounts for it," says de Verney. "But the last portion—that's what interests us most now. Hermann has not received this as yet!" And he repeats, slowly and thoughtfully, the words of the cipher: "*On receipt of this, work gas-plan you have proposed.*"

"I wonder what that is? Gas-plan! I told you they'd kill the Prince in a highly scientific manner!" cries Microbe. Then he seems to be astounded at his own shrewdness, and mutters: "Ain't I a guesser?"

To this, for a moment, Maurice says nothing; he is running over, in his mind, the letter he has received from his friend of the School of Mines. After a little, he suddenly exclaims: "I think I can answer your question now, Monsieur Microbe. This, I take it, is about the programme of these conspirators: If the weather is fine, and Louise believes the Prince is certain to come to the Bois, she will give the remainder of the cipher, in some way, to the chemist Hermann. Then, after the workmen have eaten their lunch, and as shortly as possible before the Prince's arrival—probably after he is already in the Bois—this Hermann will fill the shaft, in which the boy hides, with carbonic-acid gas. With the cover on, despite the diffusion of gases, the hole will then be deadly for an hour—perhaps two. The Prince descends unseen into his hiding-place. Before he can possibly climb out again he has fainted, and in five minutes is dead. One of his companions seeks for him for, perhaps, half an hour; then gives up the search. The Prince does not return. But little is thought of this for a few minutes. Then his attendants begin to grow anxious. They look

for him. They may be an hour or two in discovering the body, and the chances are that time has been given for the carbonic-acid gas to diffuse itself into the atmosphere. If so, I imagine it would puzzle the doctors to say what killed him. They may perhaps think the boy died from natural causes. Even if they guess what destroyed him, who shall say whether it's nature or art that deposited the fatal gas in a shaft in the ground, when it's so often found in such places? The Prince's death may be thought, by the doctors, to be natural or accidental. Or, if foul play is suspected, it will be difficult—almost impossible—to prove against those conspirators, who'll have a better chance of escape than any regicides ever did since the assassination of Julius Cæsar! That's how Lieber, Louise, and Hermann have reasoned out their programme for to-morrow."

"To-morrow! You think they'll act to-morrow?" asks Ravel, eagerly.

"Yes, if the weather permits," says Maurice. "Louise has strength of mind sufficient to act without Lieber; and every delay, now that they are ready, increases the danger to them and their conspiracy."

"Then what a surpriser we've got for them to-morrow!" cries Microbe enthusiastically. A moment after, he says: "Should we not keep a watch on mademoiselle to-night to see if she communicates with this Hermann?"

"Neither to-night nor to-morrow!" returns de Verney. "The girl may be suspicious now. Let her imagine she is watched, and she may never attempt to carry out her plan."

"Then what shall we watch?" mutters Ravel, desperately. "We must watch *something* to-morrow."

"Watch the spot where the Prince Imperial is to hide!" says Maurice. "There is the place this conspiracy must culminate. There's where we can best protect the Prince. There's where we'll catch the chemist!"

"What a mind you have!" cries Ravel, enthusiastically. "And how much money does monsieur get for all this?"

"None!" replies de Verney.

"None!" echoes the young detective; "NONE! Then for what do you take so much trouble and so much risk?"

"For France!" cries de Verney; "for France!"

"Ah! you are an Imperialist?"

"No."

"A Republican?"

"No."

"Then for what government are you?"

"For the government in *power!* What this country wants is stability; and I'm for any government that's IN, if it's half-way good. Curse the idiots who want a change because the crops are not large, or business is slack, or money is tight, or provisions high, or the sun is too hot, or the winter too cold! A government can't make all men happy; it can only give every good citizen a chance to be. First, last, and forever, I'm for FRANCE!" and de Verney looks out dreamily over the city, from which, even now, the lights are dying out, and upon which the hush of early morning is coming; then murmurs, "TO-MORROW!"

CHAPTER XIII.

TO-MORROW!

DE VERNEY awakes, to meet two surprises—one a pleasure, the other an annoyance: François brings in the first, a note brought by one of General Lapuschkin's lackeys. It is in the Russian's usual hearty style, and runs as follows:

137 RUE DU FAUBOURG ST. HONORÉ,
Thursday, April 23d, 1868.

MY DEAR DE VERNEY:

As neither you nor your governess came to hand yesterday, I take the liberty of reminding you of your promise to call upon me before I leave France. Ora asks me to say to you to be sure and come yourself—that she can do without a governess.

In the first part, I agree with her. As to a teacher for my child, you can send her after us if necessary. I shall stay in Cologne one day; Frankfort, two; Berlin, perhaps a week; and St. Petersburg till June—it being too cold at Tula to enjoy the country till then.

In case you can find a governess to-day, you can send her, up to three o'clock P.M., as I have the passport for the other one as

member of my suite, and am so well known that there will be no trouble about the substitution.

However, I hope to see you in person, and shall remain at my address until the time above mentioned, when I leave for the railroad station to catch the 3.30 train.

You need not fear to miss me ; I am too much ashamed to go out to the clubs or cafés. That fool, Dimitri Menchikoff, has wrestled with the idiot in the mask, and had his shoulder broken. But I presume you've read all this in the morning papers, and can understand my disgust and chagrin.

I can better give you all details in person, so shall simply write an *au revoir*, in which my little daughter joins. Your kindness to her yesterday seems to have captured the child's heart, as it has that of her father.

Your sincere friend,

ALEXIS LAPUSCHKIN.

Over the latter part of the note, de Verney smiles curiously ; and a moment after, looking at his little finger, by this time tightly bandaged, he mutters, "The idiot in the mask got a broken digit also !"

This letter makes him think he has a good deal to do to-day—whether he sees the general or no. He springs up to a hasty toilet and breakfast ; but long before this is finished, the annoyance comes to him, brought by Microbe.

This gentleman would be too excited to speak, were he not French, a race that becomes voluble when nervous. He cries : "Monsieur de Verney, send your man away ! I have something to tell you that will make you tear your hair and scream and curse as I did ! *Le vieux voleur ! Le sacré cochon ! Le diable*——" And Microbe explodes into a burst of sprightly profanity that is hardly checked by Maurice's voice. He first asks François to retire ; then says, "Now !"—and waits, bracing his nerves for some sudden calamity.

"The cursed scoundrel !"

"Yes !"

"The miserable thief !"

"Who ?"

"The pig ! the dog ! the devil ! the sneak-thief ! the damnable——"

He gets no further ; for de Verney, in impatient rage,

has shoved him into another room, remarking: "Do all your swearing in there! When you have finished, come back and tell me your story."

This brings Microbe down to facts. He instantly returns, and says: "That head of our department, Monsieur Claude, wishes to steal all your glory."

"I have known that all along," murmurs Maurice, with an involuntary sigh of relief. "I had feared something much more serious. Is that all?"

"No; some one has blabbed to him!"

"Ah!"

"About the Liebers; and he has sent officers, with their descriptions, to every railroad station in Paris, to arrest any of them if they try to leave town."

"Are you sure of this?" asks Maurice earnestly.

"Certain!" cries Microbe. "I saw the officers detailed to each depot myself. Ain't it a cursed shame?"

"No; it's exactly what I was going to do myself this morning, had not my friend Claude saved me the trouble," remarks de Verney, though perhaps there is a trace of annoyance in his tone; for he hardly likes any interference in his arrangements for the day.

A moment after, he says: "Don't trouble yourself, Microbe, with the railway stations. This day we've only one point of action—the Bois de Boulogne! Now, go off and discover, as soon as possible, if the Prince plays in the park this afternoon. Then send Regnier, Marcillac, and Jolly to me."

Microbe departs, and Maurice, looking at his watch, thinks he has sufficient time to attempt to fulfill the general's errand. He sends a couple of notes by François to relatives in the Faubourg St. Germain, asking if they know of any gentlewoman they can recommend for such a position; for he has made up his mind, if possible, to once more see the beautiful child who had so charmed him the morning before, and hardly cares to visit Lapuschkin without having made some attempt to fulfill his promise.

At about twelve o'clock François returns with answers to these, that give him no hope of finding a lady for the position this day—the time is too short.

A few minutes after, Ravel comes in with the news that the Prince will leave for the Bois shortly before two

in the afternoon. With him come Regnier, Jolly, and Marcillac.

To these officers Monsieur de Verney gives some very careful instructions ; and, as soon as they are gone, calls a cab and drives out to the Jardin d'Acclimatation, with a very serious look on his face.

On the road passing into the Avenue de l'Impératrice, he overtakes a coco-vender trudging along the footpath. A casual glance reveals to him it is the same disreputable one whose single rose attracted his attention the day before. Maurice apparently takes no more heed of him than he does of the thousand other pedestrians on the avenue; but a peculiar look flashes over his face. It is that of the hunter when he sees the stag coming past his shooting-stand, and within very easy range.

Leaving his hack at the entrance of the Jardin d'Acclimatation, he looks about to see if the flower-girl is here ; apparently she has not yet arrived. Next, carefully noting she is not even in sight, he strolls along the Madrid road, and, after getting well out of eye-shot of the garden, makes cautiously through the trees for the thicket from which he first saw Ora gazing into her "bear's nest." Thoroughly concealed by the thick shrubbery, he waits and watches for almost half an hour.

Then—at last—it comes !

The old coco-vender, tramping along the path, sees the little hillock, and thinks it would be a good place to eat his lunch. He sits down under the shade of a tree beside the mound, and, after unbuckling the straps which hold it on his back, places the large tin cylinder, peculiar to his trade, with its two tubes immediately over the crevice through which Maurice had, the day before, passed his hands ; then pulls out a package of rye bread and German sausage, and attacks the food—though Maurice notes his appetite is not very good, and once or twice his hand trembles.

He has not been eating over two minutes, when, as it lifts the sausage to his mouth, his arm pauses, the sausage falls upon the grass—Louise, the flower-girl, is passing along the path, singing a little Tyrolean love song ; in her hand a basket of spring roses—red, fragrant, and covered with dew !

She walks past without even appearing to see the

coco-vender, and trips on her way toward the Jardin d'Acclimatation.

As she passes from view, the coco-merchant hastily uncovers his cylinder, and in it inserts his hand, making some peculiar preparations. A moment after, he pulls out the two tubes, used in dispensing his beverage to the thirsty public; under his manipulation these suddenly grow from two feet in length to eight, and are rapidly inserted in the crevice far enough to reach the bottom of the little shaft!

Then the coco-vender is hungry again, and sits down lazily to eat once more his lunch, beside the tin instrument that contains the drink he has to sell. Once or twice, however, he pauses in his eating, to shake his machine, as if the coco in it needed agitating.

This goes on.

The man's lunch seems a long one. He has finished eating his sausage; he rises, looks through his pair of spectacles at his old silver watch, then suddenly sits down again, and waits, and waits; though de Verney, as he glares at him, can see what a power his nerves have to exercise over his muscles, to force them to be tranquil, and not carry him, despite himself, from beside his innocent machine.

Once, a bird lights upon a branch near him, and the coco-vender trembles. A squirrel runs across the path, and he starts, with a little hoarse, almost inarticulate cry. Though making no exertion, beads of perspiration gather upon his brow and dim his spectacles; his hands, apparently, grow clammy and moist, for he wipes them nervously on the towels all coco-merchants carry to cleanse their glasses. And so the old fellow waits.

After a time, however, he again consults his watch, gives a sigh of relief, suddenly rises up, and is about to strap his cylinder on his shoulder. In another moment he will be on his way to sell his coco to the children, whose shouts come faintly from the garden. As he does this, Maurice gives the signal.

Before the man can turn about, four forms spring from the thickets behind him; but, quick as they are, he would draw a pistol, were not de Verney's clutch upon his arms; and in it he is helpless as a child. A moment after, he is bound, hand and foot, by Marcillac

and Regnier, who are experts at this business, and is tossed on the ground, alongside of his coco-machine, into which Maurice looks with curious interest; for the innocent tin cylinder is occupied by the carbonic acid apparatus, which, in full action, is still bubbling away, and discharging rapidly, through the two tubes leading from it, volumes of the deadly gas into the hole in which the Prince Imperial is expected to hide within the next half-hour.

In the struggle, the coco-merchant's cap and wig have been knocked off. As Maurice turns, he recognizes him, and laughs: "The German chemist of the Rue de Maubeuge!"

And the other, glaring at him, makes a great start, then mutters: "My kind friend, who protected me from the police and returned my letters!" next, grinds his teeth, and hisses: "Monsieur de Verney, the police spy, if we but meet again, *mouchard!*"

"Get him away from here," says Maurice slowly; for this epithet is like a slap in the face to him. "You have the cab in waiting in a quiet road. Gag him, so his voice can warn no accomplice!"

At this, the chemist mutters something, then says aloud, almost desperately: "I have no accomplice!"

"Oh, ho!" jeers Microbe; "how about the flower-girl, and Lieber and his mother, and the cat Lamla? Curse me! if I don't execute that Lamla without trial!" At this, Marcillac and Regnier give a snicker; for Ravel's face is still a living record of the old woman's handiwork; and they, not knowing the truth, imagine the cat's claws have made Microbe the spectacle he is.

"Do what I tell you!" says Maurice impatiently; and, as they do his bidding, he thinks he hears two words gasped from beneath the gag they force between the German chemist's teeth—"My sister!" and knows there are tears in the man's eyes as he is led away *en route* for Mazas.

Marcillac and Jolly do this business, also carrying carefully with them the coco-machine. The whole affair has not taken over a minute, and de Verney, Microbe, and Regnier are left standing, looking into the little shaft, from which Maurice has just removed the cover.

"Now watch—and note this, to incorporate in your

evidence!" cries Maurice; and he drops a lighted match into the place. Though burning brightly, its flame dies suddenly as it reaches the entrance.

"First test!" mutters de Verney; "but I must have several. Now for some paper!"

He hastily feels in his pocket, produces two or three letters, and selects the least important; it is that from General Lapuschkin. This he lights, and, shoving it into the hole, it is extinguished in a moment. Throwing this on one side—for he is working very rapidly—he suddenly turns to Microbe, and says: "Quick! where is the living animal I told you to bring, that this evidence might be perfectly and thoroughly conclusive?"

"All right; I've got it!"

"Then bring it at once! We've no time to lose! The Prince may be here in a minute. Do you suppose I wish that child to know his life has been endangered by one he loves?—to poison his youth by the suspicions that make every monarch wretched?"

While he has been speaking, Microbe, who has needed no second order, has been acting. He runs to a neighboring thicket, and returns with a bag in his hand. Untying the mouth of this, he produces, with a grin of triumph—LAMLA!

On seeing the beast, which gives a hideous "meow!" even the chevalier can't restrain a smile. He mutters: "For our purpose, as good as any other animal!"

"Better!" returns Microbe. "A cat has nine lives!" and is about to toss the creature into the hole.

But Maurice stops him suddenly, and says: "Tie a cord to him and lower him in! We must be able to swear he died from this gas—not from a fall."

This is done.

As the cat reaches the entrance, it gives one short, gasping howl; the next instant its limbs relax; two feet from the surface it is insensible, and upon the floor of the hole it lies without motion.

De Verney looks at his watch. Five minutes after this he orders it to be drawn up; and, after inspecting the beast, remarks: "Madame Lieber has lost her pet. Lamla is as dead as the Prince would have been!"

And Microbe, with unconcealed joy, mutters: "Thank God! One of them has gone!"

"Now," cries de Verney, "to make this place HARMLESS!" And under his directions Regnier, who has made some preparation, drenches the shaft with lime-water—he having been ordered to bring that alkali with him. Then, after agitating the gas in the hole with some bushes, and thrashing the air into it and out of it vigorously for a little time, the chevalier lights a match, drops it to the bottom, and it burns.

Upon this, Maurice descends cautiously the little ladder, and, after coming out again, remarks: "Now the Prince can play this afternoon, harmless and scatheless, and not dreaming that his life has been so near the grasp of assassins."

The noise from the road is louder, the hum from the distant garden more pronounced; the Bois is filling up with its gay crowd. He hurriedly directs Microbe to take Regnier and station themselves on watch over Madame Lieber's house—to permit no one to go there or come away from it; in case the old woman shows any sign of leaving the premises, to arrest her. "I rather imagine, with Regnier's assistance, you can manage the old lady!" mutters Maurice, with a smile.

"And the flower-girl?" suddenly asks Microbe.

"I will look after that young lady," replies the chevalier confidently, and turns toward the Jardin d'Acclimatation.

So the two officers depart. When they are out of earshot, Ravel suddenly turns to the silent Regnier, laughs, and says: "It's a pity she's so beautiful, and Monsieur de Verney so young!"

"Why?" interjects his saturnine companion.

"Because his temptation this afternoon will be so enormous."

"Yes, I never like to arrest beautiful women," mutters Regnier, solemnly; "their wrists are nearly always too small for my handcuffs." This glum rejoinder checks Ravel, who appears at present in high spirits.

Maurice de Verney looks at his watch; it is but five minutes of two. Then he mutters: "Now for the last of them! I'll give her no more mercy than she would have given her little victim." A moment after he thinks, with a sigh, "And so young and beautiful!" then strides toward the Jardin d'Acclimatation, determined to do his

duty despite this assassin's loveliness and tender age. As he disappears round a turn in the path, a girl—who has been lying concealed in the thicket, panting and trembling, and gazing at him while he has been at work on the shaft, and choking down her moans of baffled malice and anxious despair—staggers up and almost reels toward the hiding-place of the Prince.

It is Louise, who—the time drawing very near for her royal prey—has cautiously returned, to be absolutely sure that her trap is set and baited. She has seen Maurice descend into the hole and return alive—enough to tell her all is wrong! She only goes near the place to discover if there is a possibility of her brother's escape. The signs of the struggle tell her that hope is gone. She is turning away with a sigh of utter, helpless despair, when, catching sight of a paper lying near the shaft, she picks it up in almost unreasoning misery, glances at it, then starts and reads it over carefully again.

The next moment, with a flush of hope and excitement on her face, the girl starts and runs with all her might through one of the small paths leading to the Allée de Longchamp. Hurrying along this a little way, she chances to find an unengaged cab, and, getting in, cries: "Rue des Vignes—double speed, double *pourboire!*"

Unconscious of this, Maurice gets to the Madrid road, and finds the Imperial equipages drawn up by the spot the Prince uses as a play-ground.

The boy has several of his companions with him, and apparently is ready for a prolonged game. The tutor is with them, blinking through his glasses at their preparations. From the crowd of passing carriages and pedestrians, quite a number have clustered round the Imperial party.

Into this throng de Verney plunges, thinking surely that the girl will be here. He is soon conscious that he is mistaken; for he hears the Prince asking for her also, and saying that Mademoiselle Louise had promised to bring a most beautiful prize for the longest hider in that day's game; that they'll wait a little—Mademoiselle Louise will surely come!"

Agreeing in this view, Maurice stands looking, even

more impatiently and more anxiously than the royal boy, into the throng of people and vehicles passing along the Madrid road.

After a little the Prince grows almost petulant, and cries: "She never disappointed me before!—and I've brought a pocket full of money to-day, to buy her roses!"

Maurice can remain idle no longer. He strides to the entrance of the Jardin d'Acclimatation. The girl is not there; then hurries back to the Prince's party—no Louise!

A moment after his return, a little boy says to the Prince: "Young emperor, I saw the flower-girl walking along that path," and points toward the one leading to the hiding-place.

"Ah! she was going to fix *my*——" cries the Prince; then suddenly checks himself, fearing to disclose his point of concealment to his companions. A moment after, he asks the urchin: "How long ago did you see Mademoiselle Louise?"

"Oh, just before you drove up here, little king!"

"Why, that was at ten minutes to two, you remember, Conneau," says the Prince to his pet companion. "Louise has been away twenty-five minutes!"

As for de Verney, he has given one mighty start, and is running to gain his cab at the gate of the gardens. If Louise passed along that path at ten minutes before two, she must have seen him at work at the Prince's hiding-place, and have known that her plot had been discovered and destroyed.

Stimulating his hackman by the only bribe that appeals to a French hackman's soul—a double *pourboire*—Maurice is now driven rapidly to the Rue des Vignes, to find there Microbe and Regnier watching Lieber's house.

In answer to his hurried questions, they say that no one since their arrival has entered the Alsacian's home.

"Has any one left it?" asks Maurice.

"No!" replies Microbe; "but as we came into one end of this street a cab was disappearing at the other, and going like the deuce—though we have no reason to imagine it came from Lieber's house."

"How long have you been here?"

"About ten minutes!"

"Very well," says de Verney ; "we'll search Lieber's house !"

As they walk to the door, Maurice questions Microbe a little more closely about the police arrangements at the stations. "You don't think the girl could leave Paris by rail ?" he queries.

"What ! one of the Lieber family ? Not with Mr. Claude's special officers and special directions at every station ! Besides, if she walked out of Paris, how is she to get out of France without a passport ? They'd be sure to stop her on the frontier !" returns Microbe.

That the girl cannot escape from France now seems certain to de Verney, as he remembers how anxious she had been for a passport for Madame Lieber and servant —and concludes Louise meant, if necessary, to play the part of domestic to the old woman till they passed out of France.

By the time he has calmed himself with this idea, the party have come to the gate of Lieber's garden. Leaving Regnier and Microbe out of sight, Maurice walks to the front door ; and, after making considerable noise without response, strolls round to the back garden, to find Madame Lieber disconsolately looking for her cat.

She would give him a pathetic account of Lamla's adventures of the last two days, but he stops her by saying, in German, that he would like to see Miss Louise on immediate business.

At this, from pathos the old woman goes into rage. "Louise !" she cries. "You want that worthless Louise ! That lazy hussy went toward the city not ten minutes ago, when she should have been earning her bread selling flowers to the Prince at the park ! Yes, drove up from the Bois in a *hired* cab—a two-franc-an-hour *voiture !* —ran up-stairs, though I screamed to her to come and help find Lamla, and three minutes after flew down again and drove off like on a race-course for the city ! She must have given the driver extra money—he went so fast. There's extravagance——"

The old lady pauses in her harangue ; for de Verney, on hearing this, has bolted for the front gate, where he meets Regnier and Microbe. Charging the former to search the house and arrest Madame Lieber, but to treat her with great kindness, he takes Microbe with him and

runs to his cab. "Now," he says, "which way did you see that hack disappear ?"

"Toward the Champs Élysées !"

"That's rather a roundabout way to the Hospital Val de Grâce !" remarks Maurice; and he hustles Microbe in, and tells the driver to take them straight for the Champs Élysées. While they rattle along, Maurice thinks, and they are no sooner near a hack-stand than he tells his assistant to jump out, take another carriage, and hurry to the hospital ; for he has an idea Louise may have gone there to warn Lieber and assist his escape ; though the route she has apparently taken leads from the Val de Grâce, and much more in the direction of the Rue de Maubeuge, where, he has a faint hope, she may have driven to warn the chemist Hermann ; for he is not sure Louise knows of her brother's arrest.

So, when his driver asks for further instructions, Maurice tells him, 55 Rue de Maubeuge, like lightning ! He looks at his watch ; it is now three o'clock.

Ten minutes after this, his hack is stopped by a jam of vehicles in the Rue de La Fayette. Next to him, going in the same direction, is a carriage, from which a girlish voice attracts his attention.

He glances out, and, within a few feet of him, sees Ora Lapuschkin.

She is seated on her father's knee, looking, with eager, childish enjoyment, on the busy street scene about her, and, for the moment, does not see him.

Behind the carriage which contains Ora and the general are two others, filled with the immediate attendants of this great Russian *boyard*, and laden with the minor baggage of his family. These are all *en route* for the Gare du Nord, to catch the 3.30 express for Cologne and Frankfort.

The driver of de Verney's cab at this moment sees a chance to dodge through an opening in the crowded street, and suddenly whips up for the effort.

This attracts the attention of both the father and the child. Lapuschkin waves his hand, smiles, and says something that the roar of the street drowns ; but Ora cries out with all her little might, and is faintly heard : "Thank you ! thank you, dear Monsieur de Verney ! I like her very much !"

"Who the devil is she thanking me for?" wonders Maurice, by no means sure he has heard aright. The child's fair hair streaming in the wind, and her noble blue eyes gazing eagerly toward him, make too pretty a picture for Maurice not to take another glance at it.

He turns his head, looks back, and as they pass from view notes, in the carriage immediately behind that of the general, the honest-eyed peasant girl Vassilissa, and, seated beside her, a lady muffled in a dark cloak, and heavily veiled. The aristocratic figure and pose of the woman are so different from those of the average Russian household servant, that Maurice, as he loses sight of the party, thinks: "Lapuschkin must have got his governess without my aid, after all!"

The next moment he has driven even the beautiful little girl out of his mind, and is intent once more on the arrest of Louise, the flower-girl of the Jardin d'Acclimatation.

At the Rue de Maubeuge, disappointment again awaits him. No one, man or woman, has visited the apartments of the German chemist since Hermann deserted them, nearly forty-eight hours before!

De Verney's next immediate hope is, that Louise may have gone to the Val de Grâce and have fallen into the clutches of Microbe, or some of the officers guarding the helpless Lieber. He drives straight to that hospital, and finds no Louise; though Ravel has captured her hackman, that worthy having just driven up with a letter for Auguste Lieber, marked "Immediate."

He is now in custody, and jabbering with rage, apparently not at his captors, but at the girl, for getting him into such a scrape!

Maurice immediately opens this note. It has been hurriedly written, is in Louise's handwriting, and gives him some curious information that makes him start and cry out, but does not help his search; for it reads thus:

THURSDAY.

MY DARLING HUSBAND:

Immediately take care of yourself. I am safe.

YOUR LOVING WIFE.

After the first moment of astonishment at the relationship the woman bears Lieber, and a sudden idea enter-

ing his head that Louise is probably more cunning than even he gave her the credit of being, Maurice turns to the hackman, who is so savage at the girl that he gives his information without asking :

"I had driven a party of sports out to the race-course at Longchamp, and was returning through the Bois, hoping to pick up a fare, when a girl, breathless and panting, ran after and signaled me."

"Where did this happen?" interrupts de Verney.

"On the Allée de Longchamp, about a hundred yards after passing the road to the Neuilly gate."

"Ah! at what time?"

"According to law, I showed her my watch—because women so often dispute my fare. It was two o'clock precisely."

"By heaven! she saw us, sure!" mutters Microbe, and gives a melancholy whistle.

"What then?" asks de Verney, eagerly.

"Well, I drove her, as fast and straight as I could, to a house near the Rue des Vignes."

"Yes!"

"She lives there."

"I know that. What next?"

"She ran into the house, and in three minutes skipped out again, with a long, dark cloak over her dress, a heavy veil over her bonnet, and a small traveling-bag in her hand."

"Well?"

"Well, I'm talking as fast as I can! I drove her to the Champs Élysées; there she stopped me, got out, gave me a twenty-franc piece and that letter, and told me to deliver it at once."

"What time did she leave you?"

"About twenty minutes to three."

"Whereabouts in the Champs Élysées did she stop you?"

"At a little distance before we came to the Rond Point."

"Which way did she go?"

"I don't know exactly, there are so many streets running out of the avenue near there. She went north, though, in the direction of the Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré."

"Was she in a hurry?"

"I should think so! She owed me only three francs, and didn't wait for change for her twenty-franc piece! *Mon Dieu!* if it should be bad!"

Here the hackman suddenly dives into his pockets, produces and carefully tests Louise's coin, an awful fear having fallen on him during his last speech.

"Get on your box and drive us back to where the girl left you! Do it quickly—and not a word of this to any one, or you may find yourself in a place that'll astonish you!"

Inspired by these words, the hackman gets them back to where Louise left him, in the Champs Élysées, in a hurry.

From this spot Microbe and de Verney make a long, vigorous, and unsuccessful search and inquiry upon all the streets leading north. They can find no one who has seen a girl answering to the description of Louise. This is perhaps to be expected, as the streets in this quarter, at three o'clock, are crowded with people.

Maurice keeps up this inquiry till after nightfall, then returns, worn out and disgusted with himself, to the Rue d'Hautville.

He is still, however, sure that the girl must be in Paris, and sends Microbe for Monsieur Claude to ask for additional watchers at the railway stations.

Consequently, about nine o'clock the *chef* of the *Department de Sûreté* enters Maurice's parlor, grins at him, and says: "She has slipped your fingers, *mon amateur*."

"No," says Maurice, "not if your men at the railroads have done their duty."

And he tells Monsieur Claude all that happened that day.

"Oh, mademoiselle is in Paris, I've no doubt!" murmurs the o'd policeman. "But you did your work very badly, Monsieur de Verney. You should have watched *every* point—the Rue des Vignes, the Rue de Maubeuge, the girl herself—all this day, no matter if you did frighten her. Amateurs in police are like amateurs on the stage—sometimes brilliant, but lacking in the routine business of their art."

With this he goes out to make arrangements for a thorough search of Paris for the missing Louise, leaving Maurice wincing at his words.

Thinking that he may perhaps get some information from the German chemist, after a little the chevalier goes to Mazas, and in that prison interviews the man Hermann.

In his cell this conspirator glares at him, and for a time refuses to answer any questions. Finally he says: "If you will tell me one thing, Monsieur Police-spy, I'll answer you another. You ask the reason of our attempt. Tell me"—here the man trembles and tears come into his eyes—"is my—my sister yet arrested, and I'll give you the information on that point."

"Very well," replies de Verney. "Louise has not yet been apprehended."

At this, the scientific criminal mutters, "Thank God!" and after a moment's consideration replies: "You wish to know the motive that prompted our political action—mind you, I do not admit it was a crime."

"Call it what you like," says Maurice. "What was your reason for it?"

Then he gets an answer that astounds him:

The German philosopher cries, "Philanthropy!"

"*Philanthropy!*" stammers de Verney, not sure he has heard aright.

"*Yes*, PHILANTHROPY!" returns Hermann, his eyes lighting up. "To seat his son firmly on the throne he has built up by blood, Louis Napoleon must wage a successful war. Each day the mutterings of the people at Belleville and Montmartre tell him that! Germany is the country he will naturally attack: the increased garrisons on the Rhine frontier point straight at us. His son dead, his ambition dies also. He has no heir—and perhaps he'll let us have peace. Therefore, some fellow-philanthropists and myself arranged for the child a painless sleep that had no dreams and no awaking—that was all! Better one weeping empress than a hundred thousand bereft French and German mothers!"

"And you did this for no selfish end?" mutters Maurice.

"No—I don't sell my life for money! I am a philanthropist and a socialist!" cries the man enthusiastically.

"A socialist?"

"Yes, a socialist—nihilist—whatever name you wish!

You aristocrats don't know us yet!" echoes the chemist. "Europe has not yet been introduced to us; presidents, kings, emperors, and czars, have not yet had the pleasure of our acquaintance. But we are coming—to destroy all who insult the human race by daring to govern it!"

And as Maurice leaves the man, astonished at his words, he notes a wild light upon his face, that seems to him like the joy of battle; but it is not—it is the lurid glare of political mania.

It is not surprising that de Verney did not understand this man, for Europe was not at that time very well acquainted with this sect of philosophical maniacs, who consider themselves so badly treated by God that they avenge themselves on mankind; though, since then, more has been learned about them by potentates and emperors, and particularly "he of Russia," who has by them been taught to know the sensations of a plump partridge in the hunting season, and whose royal bones have been chilled to their imperial marrow by the eccentricities of their antics with bombs, dynamite, and sudden death.

This interview impresses de Verney so much that it has a curious effect on the fate of the prisoners Hermann and Lieber.

Late as it is, he succeeds in getting an audience with the Emperor that night, and makes his report of the whole affair, by no means excusing his negligence in permitting the temporary escape of Louise.

At his astonishing recital, his majesty stares—then, after a little, says: "The Prince does not guess that he was so near destruction from the hands of one he thought his friend?"

"Not yet, sire," replies Maurice; "and, if I may offer my advice, never let him know." With this he relates his interview with Hermann, and remarks that the publicity of such peculiar attempts always incites political cranks to others of a similar nature. "If you try these men publicly for this crime, you will have an epidemic of attempts upon the life of the Prince to guard against. You've got these men in your hands; you know their guilt; you can convict them whenever you wish. Keep them where they can do no harm, but don't publicly try them!"

"I imagine you are right," mutters the Emperor.

After a little pause of thought, he continues: "I can hardly express my thanks for my son's safety and life to you, *Colonel* de Verney!" then stops any attempt at acknowledgment from Maurice, by saying: "Good-evening, my dear colonel! You may expect your commission to-morrow, and the grand cross when you bring me that would-be assassin of a child who loved and trusted her!"

So Maurice bows himself out, but never gains the grand cross; for, let Monsieur Claude search as much as he can, and Microbe, Regnier, and Jolly exert themselves to their utmost, no trace of the flower-girl of the Jardin d'Acclimatation is ever seen again in Paris!

CHAPTER XIV.

A RUSSIAN GOVERNESS.

THREE weeks after this, the *chef* of the *Bureau de Sûreté* enters Maurice's rooms in the Rue d'Hautville, tosses an envelope on the table, and, with a smile, says: "Your orders for Africa, colonel!"

"My orders for where?" cries de Verney, jumping up.

"For Algeria; where your regiment, I believe, is stationed."

To this the chevalier does not, for a moment, reply. He has broken the seal of the packet, and is mastering its contents.

"You are right!" he returns, a minute later; "but I—I cannot understand it."

"I think I can," sneers Monsieur Claude. "The Emperor imagines that Louise was too beautiful and you too young."

"What proof has he of this *lie?*" cries Maurice, the blush of outraged manhood on his cheeks.

"Plenty!"

"Plenty? Impossible!"

"Not at all, my dear de Verney," murmurs the old *chef*. "You wrote to several of your relatives, asking

them to recommend a lady for the position of governess in the family of General Lapuschkin."

"Yes, of course," answers Maurice. "What of that?"

"Ah! what a *farceur* you are! You should go on the stage at the Palais Royal!"

"*What of that?*" says de Verney between his teeth, in a tone that compels an answer.

"Well, Mademoiselle Louise escaped from Paris, under a passport, as the general's governess. She delivered a note, that he had written to you, as her recommendation, and stated you sent her to him! Our agent in Berlin discovered that. She is now in St. Petersburg, and, I believe, very much loved and respected by the general and his little daughter."

At this, Claude gets an answer he does not expect; for Maurice cries out suddenly: "That angel to be taught by that devil! Great heavens!"

A moment after, he says, more calmly: "I have not the time to right myself with the Emperor to-day. I must first protect General Lapuschkin and his daughter;" and bows out Monsieur Claude, astonished.

De Verney immediately applies for leave, for his first thought is to go to Russia in person. This is not only sternly refused him, but he is ordered to depart for his regiment in Africa immediately. The tone of these instructions is such that it indicates, if his commission as colonel had not been approved and delivered, so that it could not be canceled without court-martial, he would never command a regiment.

On receiving this, Maurice bites his lips with rage, and for a moment would resign from the army; but an hour's consideration banishes this from his mind. He is perfectly aware that in a year or two France must be involved in some great war; and, though he would fight for his country as a volunteer if necessary, prefers, if possible, to do so as the colonel of a dashing cavalry regiment.

Stung by the injustice with which he has been treated, he attempts no effort at explanation to the Emperor, but makes all his preparations to leave Paris that night; among others, writing a long letter to General Lapuschkin, telling him all the occurrences leading to Louise's resenting the letter the Russian had written to him,

and using his name to obtain admission to the general's service, in order to escape from France. This he takes to the post-office and registers in person, so as to be sure of its delivery.

Thus warned, the general's family will be safe ; for no sane man could keep Louise Lieber as his daughter's instructress after reading the letter Maurice had written.

That night, attended by François, Maurice de Verney goes to the Boulevard Mazas, to the great station of the Paris, Marseilles, and Lyons Railway, *en route* for Algeria.

The train is within five minutes of starting, when young Microbe breaks through the crowd to bid the chevalier farewell. His going has been so sudden that few of his fashionable friends have learned of his departure ; none, anyway, are here to bid him good-by, and wish him safe return from the hot, pestilential climate to which he goes.

Perhaps his fall from imperial favor may have something to do with this ; for such rumors soon find the public ear, and their breath blows away popularity. At least, this is the way de Verney is reasoning, as Microbe comes up to him and seizes his hand ; for he says : " My poor Ravel, you are the only one ! " then mutters : " And they have not promoted you for all you did in that affair ? "

" No," returns the young officer. " Monsieur Claude seems to hate me. But they daren't turn me off the force till they try those two in there ; " and he gives a French shrug of his shoulders, and a Quartier Latin wink toward the great prison Mazas, that stands nearly opposite the railroad depot, where Hermann and Lieber are both fretting away their lives in its hot and silent cells.

" Then you've got nothing for your services ? " remarks the chevalier, extending a parting hand ; for the train is now about starting, and they have walked to de Verney's compartment, where François, with his master's valise and a couple of cavalry sabers, has preceded them.

" Oh, yes, I have ! " cries Microbe ; " I've got the friendship of a great man—one who, if they'd let him, would be a worthy successor to Vidocq ! "

At this extraordinary compliment, de Verney winces ; though, knowing it is well meant, and that this little

detective regards that ex-galley-slave, spy, and villain as one of the greatest names in French history, he mutters: "Is that all?"

"No, not all," whispers Microbe. "I've got your present—the Mabille suit, in which, last Sunday, I danced the *grand écart* to shrieks of applause; and this ring—the one you gave me, the one by which I'll never forget you, the one by which you can have my heart's blood when you want it, the one by which I'll chance handcuffs and death to do your bidding; for I love you!"

Here the enthusiastic little fellow embraces de Verney, and kisses him, after the manner of his country, upon both cheeks.

As he does so, two sad drops fall upon Maurice's face. He knows they come from one true heart that loves him; and, forgetting rank and station, he hugs this little thief-taker in his arms: for the bravest are also the tenderest.

Thus the train takes him away.

Gazing back, he sees tears glistening on Microbe's face, who is waving the ruby ring at him, flashing red in the blaze of the station lamps—red as the signal of danger, red as the signal of death and despair when he shall see that ruby ring again. But with it shall come to him hope that had left him, and a fighting chance for all that makes the good of life; safety for the being he loves, and love for himself, her savior. That's what that ruby ring will mean when next he sees its red light gleam.

The letter Maurice de Verney wrote to General Lapuschkin was not delivered in St. Petersburg, but followed that Russian nobleman to his estates in Tula, south of Moscow, where he had somewhat suddenly gone, lured by the first fine weather of spring. But winter seems always loath to leave Russia; and, after his arrival, there came a great cold storm, that fell upon and destroyed this old gentleman, who, living in France for several years, had become accustomed to its milder climate.

So, when this letter came, it was into a house of mourning. The little Ora, her governess, Mademoiselle Marguerite de Brian, and the servants were all in black

for the departed veteran ; and acting as executor of the estates, and guardian of the person of Ora, was her uncle, the Prince Sergius Platoff.

This gentleman, a *bon-vivant*, spendthrift, and gamester, had paid but little attention to the lady instructing Ora up to this time. He read the letter carefully over several times, then placed it in his pocketbook among his valuable papers, and strolled out upon the lawn in front of the large Russian country house, where Mademoiselle de Brian and her charge were standing ; for the winter, after having slain the poor old general, had again departed, leaving the sun shining brightly, and spring again upon the land.

After a few minutes' casual conversation with the young lady, whom he now condescends to notice is very beautiful, Sergius Platoff remarks, "My dear mademoiselle, I've just received a letter about you from France."

The girl looks at him suddenly, perhaps with a little more of the lily on her cheeks than she had before he spoke ; then mutters, "From whom ?"

"From an old friend of yours, Maurice de Verney !"

"Ah ! from Monsieur Maurice," cries little Ora, who, though grieving for her father bitterly, has only the sadness of a child, which is easily put away by present excitement. "He is the gentleman to whom I showed the 'bear's nest' in the Bois de Boulogne nearly two months ago. In April, just before you came to us, dear Mademoiselle Marguerite—you remember when he sent you to us—just before we left Paris."

But Mademoiselle Marguerite does not answer the child. She is gazing at her guardian, who in a jovial, open-hearted way is saying, "How pleasant it is to know one is not forgotten, Mademoiselle Louise !—I beg your pardon, Marguerite—and, I assure you, Monsieur de Verney *has not forgotten you.*"

"I—I presume you will not much longer require my services, now—the count is dead ?" says the governess, slowly and significantly.

"Oh ! by no means ; I particularly wish you to stay here," laughs the prince. "Now that I have such a good character of you from de Verney, I particularly wish you to instruct my niece. But, *ma petite*, you had better

drop in and see me in my library to-morrow morning!" For this gentleman has in the last week or two got in the habit of speaking of the property of little Ora almost as his own, and now a most extraordinary idea for keeping continued possession of all this helpless child's vast property and wealth has suddenly formed itself in his most subtle brain. Not that this came in a moment to him in every cunning detail, for these last were the product of the thought of almost a cycle of Le Prince Sergius Platoff's life; but still, as he on that spring day gazed at the governess of his little ward, and knew she was a socialist, the germ of that extraordinary plot was planted in his mind and took root to bud and blossom into so fantastic a piece of deviltry that old Beelzebub in Hades chuckled and laughed to his imps, "Ha! ha! Here's a scholar that surpasses his master! Room near the fire for another Russian *boyard!*"

Stunned as she is by the news from France—for Marguerite de Brian understands that Prince Sergius Platoff knows she is Louise Lieber—that young lady has not forgotten the chance remark of her beautiful charge about the "bear's nest" she had shown Monsieur de Verney in the Bois de Boulogne, and a few minutes after obtains from the little girl the account of how she had disclosed to the man, she now knows was on the track of her conspiracy, the hiding-place of the Prince Imperial. She gnashes her teeth over this revelation; and the passive dislike that the wicked generally have for the good—which had been her feeling up to this time for her pupil—changes into an active personal hate, that would be awful between adversaries, but is horrible, cowardly, and cruel when held by one in authority over a helpless child that must look to her for the teachings that will lead to the future happiness or misery of her life.

She glares at her beautiful charge, then goes silently into the house and to her room. There she thinks and thinks.

If she can keep her position here, far away from interfering friends and officious relatives, what an immensity of revenge this child, who has been an innocent agent in her unhappiness and despair, offers to her! Every night of her life since his arrest this curious young woman has wet her pillow with tears for her absent husband, from whom the

walls of the Mazas prison forever separate and divide her ; for the brawny muscle and bearish strength of the gigantic Lieber had won Louise's heart. She loved her husband after the manner that tigresses love, and even they will avenge the destruction and taking off of their mates. It is perhaps this physical feeling that dominates her mind as she takes down from the wall of her room a long, lithe, stinging riding-whip, looks caressingly upon it, and switches it through the air—then cries, " Will not I ? *Will not I?* How this little creature who has stung me shall be stung by this ! " and with this determines at the first disobedience or failure in her tasks, to make a cruel reckoning with the victim that is now within her hand.

She has almost immediate opportunity for this revenge ; but the very circumstances that give rise to it save the beautiful child from this humiliation forever.

The next morning, as Mademoiselle de Brian, the governess, enters the prince's study, she sees that genial gentleman—who has not as yet been able to remember that a few years before the Czar abolished serfdom—give Vassilissa, the beloved foster-sister of her charge, a couple of sounding cuffs upon the ear, the girl having accidentally knocked down and broken a vase in the apartment.

Though Vassilissa is sixteen, and her sturdy peasant face reddens beneath the slaps, and tears gather in her eyes, she makes no resistance ; the blood of her ancestors has been subdued and made patient before it entered her veins ; she only looks doggedly at her master.

Enraged perhaps by her manner, the prince's hand is raised again ; but, before it falls, there is a whisk of short skirts, and Ora, who has been playing outside, has flown through the open French window and stands between the smiter and the smitten.

She cries, " Don't you dare to strike *my* foster-sister again ! I love her, do you hear? you cruel old man ! I love her ! " and confronts with brave, indignant eyes her uncle, who winces at the " old man " in the speech more than anything else.

" Perhaps, my dear, you do not know that Vassilissa has broken one of my vases ; she is slovenly and careless, and perhaps owes to your foolish spoiling the punishment she received," mutters the prince, turning an evil eye upon the child, who still confronts him.

The answer he gets enrages him still more. "One of *your* vases!" screams the little countess; "one of *my* vases!—Vassilissa, you can break the other one if you wish! They are all mine; everything is mine when I grow up; you are free to smash it; you are no longer a slave. Papa, my dear, dead papa, told me that every one in Russia was free—free to do as they pleased. FREE! Break that vase! I order you to! Vassilissa, break it before my naughty uncle's eyes! What! you won't? Then I will!" —SMASH! and the little countess has dashed the other vase into pieces right before Sergius Platoff's astonished eyes, and flashed out of the room in an agony of tears.

The prince and the governess turn and gaze at each other—they are alone now, for Vassilissa had prudently got out of the apartment even before her little mistress.

The prince looks at the couple of broken Dresden vases, utters three awful Russian curses, then says: "A few hundred rubles gone to the devil." A moment after he continues, with pointed politeness, "I beg your pardon, Mademoiselle de Brian, for losing my temper, but I imagine you must have heard an oath before. All Alsacians curse—especially athletes. I've heard them myself in the Gymnasia of Strasbourg, *often!*"

The girl reddens at this, then grows pale—but a moment after walks straight up to him and whispers: "You know my secret—don't taunt me with it. Am I to stay here, or shall I go?"

The prince looks her over, laughs a little, then says: "Stay!"

"Am I to have full control of that——"

"That little devil! Yes!" cries Sergius, taking the words out of her mouth; "if you do my will. Ora is not a young lady yet. She has absurd ideas as to her own freedom from control; also, more absurd ones about liberty in Russia, that may some day get her into trouble. You have not brought her up very well in the two months she has been under your charge, my dear Mademoiselle de Brian; but perhaps her father was a check on your corrections. You have my authority—whip the little countess till she fears you!"

Mademoiselle de Brian looks at the prince, and knows he hates the child as she does; but, though there is a

great longing in her mind for instant revenge, and a flush of cruelty comes over her face at the thought that she might now revel in this beautiful girl's terror, cries, and humiliation, she checks it and astonishes Sergius, for she says : " I have a better plan with the child. I will *not* make her fear me ! "

" No ? "

" But love me ! love me and—TRUST me ! "

" *Le diable !* "

" Then I can make her the woman *I wish her to become !* " As she says this, the governess's eyes become lurid.

Noting their baneful gleam, Sergius Platoff thinks he understands her, and cries, " All right ! Have your own way, my ex-conspirator. Educate the girl, but educate her *liberally !* LIBERALLY ! and when she grows up——. " Here he laughs a little nasty laugh, which is echoed by Mademoiselle de Brian.

Then, from that day on, this woman strives by every feminine art to win the love and trust of Ora Lapuschkin; and, giving her every accomplishment to make her coming fate more bitter, implants in the heart of this noble child those doctrines of universal freedom, broad and elevated thought, love for her fellows, and devotion to liberty that in other lands the world over bring the honor of our fellow-men, the high esteem of our neighbors, the love of our kindred, and the happiness and nobility of our own lives ; but in Russia lead down to despair, torture, Siberia, and death by the executioner.

So this education goes on, the child becoming a greater worshiper at the shrine of freedom ; when, some two years afterward, her cousin Dimitri Menchikoff, visiting Tula to see his fiancée—for, Ora's father dying, the marriage contract had not been canceled—looks at her governess and recognizes the flower-girl he had seen in the Jardin d'Acclimatation in Paris.

Detained in that capital some months after his *début* in the salle Les Arènes by his broken shoulder, some rumors of the exploits of Mademoiselle Louise have come to his ears.

He knows pretty well what they indicate in regard to this young lady, for Monsieur Dimitri has grown quite

cunning in police matters lately, having been appointed to a junior command in the third section, and even now being on his return from the Caucasus, where he has distinguished himself by police atrocities upon a village commune who forgot to pay their taxes.

In his sleepy, eastern way, this young man notes the peculiar style of instruction his little cousin is receiving, and the increasing grace and beauties of the child, who each day grows more lovely as she grows more womanly; and, one day he and Sergius Platoff being alone together after dinner, and the wine making them outspoken, Dimitri remarks: "That governess you have for Ora 'll teach the child things that may bring her into the clutches of the police when she grows older."

"Pooh!" cries the Prince Platoff, "mademoiselle is only giving my little ward a *liberal* education!"

"Ha, ha! a *liberal* education!" mutters Dimitri, who knows that, in case of harm coming to Ora, he will be co-heir with Platoff. Then a gleam of understanding comes into his small, cunning Tartar eyes, and these catching an answering leer in those of Sergius, they wink at each other and laugh; for each of these two infernal scoundrels knows he is entitled to half of the big financial bone that Ora's vast estates will make; but does not know that the villain grinning at him has determined to have—THE WHOLE OF IT!

BOOK III.

THE WEB OF THE RUSSIAN SECRET POLICE.

CHAPTER XV.

DON'T YOU REMEMBER ME?

THUS things ran along at Tula for several years, until Ora had grown almost to womanhood; Mademoiselle de Brian remaining at the great country house, chiefly engaged in the education of her charge; and Sergius Platoff making his home, the most of this time, in St. Petersburg, giving out that the management of his ward's property compelled his residence at the capital; finding this a convenient place to squander the fortune of the orphan heiress in *liaisons* with the French and German actresses of the Michael Theater, and the figurantes, and ballet girls, who flourished each winter when Italian opera was given in the Bolskoi Theater that has witnessed so many triumphs for the song birds of this earth. These ladies of the ballet cost the prince a great deal of Ora's money; but the terrific play at cards, and dicing of the Imperial Yacht Club, famous for its excess in that line, where young Demidoff lost 1,800,000 roubles in a single night, ran away with more of it.

Each day that his ward was growing nearer an age when she could demand a reckoning, increased Sergius's anxiety to place all danger of such a thing behind him, by some *coup* that would make all her property his forever; for not only the enormous revenues of little Ora's vast estates had been squandered, but the prince was

taking a bite, wherever possible, out of the orphan's capital. This desire was not made less strong by the thought that Dimitri Menchikoff, in his silent, Tartar way, was waiting eagerly for the child to arrive at such an age that he could claim a fulfillment of his marriage contract, and, as Ora's husband, demand a reckoning of the moneys that had accumulated during her minority, from her guardian.

Prince Menchikoff, though not taking part in the Turkish war, was frequently away from St. Petersburg, engaged permanently with the Third Section, or secret police, in suppressing the socialist propaganda that was gradually eating its way into almost all classes of Russian life, and destined shortly to change from a peaceful, almost religious, movement, to that political volcano which, in its eruption, made Russia a social pandemonium.

On this sea of political passion Prince Sergius Platoff, from his *petits soupers* with *ballerine* and the gaming-tables of the Imperial Yacht Club, looked rather gleefully; for, to his cunning mind, it suggested the only hope for his financial salvation. True, if the worst came, he might bribe the judges to decide in his favor—the usual method by which the eyes of blind justice are opened to the truth in Russia; but then Dimitri might bribe also—and, perchance, awful to think of—*higher!*

So he still lived his spendthrift life; and, becoming closely pressed for money, one night after fearful losses at play, the prince was compelled to obtain a loan at usurious interest from a Hebrew banker, one Isaacavitch Zamaroff, who, from ignoble swindlings of the poor, had become opulent enough to prey upon the rich.

This financier had lately made large sums of money, in conjunction with an American speculator, J. Madison Skinner, in building, for the Russian Government, railroads in Bessarabia, to be used in the military operations of the Turkish war, then at its height.

This J. Madison Skinner was now prudently closing up his contracts with the Imperial Government, and settling his accounts with Zamaroff, preparatory to leaving the country, his keen Yankee eye foreseeing a political upheaval ahead; his keen Yankee motto being, "When there's political danger, there's financial danger."

This gentleman was the father of that practical young lady, Miss Sallie, who had noticed the base-ball finger on the hand of the masked wrestler. She had been married to a Chicago gentleman shortly after her Paris trip, and now, being divorced, was keeping house for her father in the big palace on the Frontanka Canal, belonging to Ora Lapuschkin, which they rented from Prince Platoff; and, under the name of Mrs. S. Wetmore Johnston, was making a great *splurge* in Russian society, with her diamonds, money, American *chic*, and grand entertainments.

During the year 1877, the loans that Prince Platoff obtained from Zamaroff grew gradually larger; until, with accumulated and usurious interest, they reached a great sum, Zamaroff at that time being an accommodating creditor for two reasons: first, he fondly hoped, by means of the prince, to obtain a footing in the court society in which Platoff's family and connections made him prominent—a thing which Zamaroff had as much chance of achieving as of going to heaven; for no clique in the world is more autocratic in its exclusiveness than the boyard set of Russia; and Herr Zamaroff's manners and demeanor were better suited to a pig-sty than a palace; second, the usurer *imagined* he had good security, being very cunning and not guessing that his customer, under his bluff, off-hand manner, carried the *finesse du diable* himself.

This peculiar ability of his debtor came home to Herr Zamaroff sudden as a thunderclap, but bright as a flash of lightning, one awful afternoon in the month of January, 1878—bringing with it despair to the trusting Isaacavitch.

It was in this manner: Platoff had sent for him to come to his apartments on the Baseinaia Oulitza, after the haughty manner of a boyard, and Zamaroff was leaving his offices, which he held in conjunction with Skinner, on the Bolchoi Prospect, to obey.

"Hello! where are you bolting?" asks the American.

"To his high nobility's, the Prince Sergius Platoff's," returns Zamaroff, with a squirm of joy; for he thinks that this sudden summons may mean repayment; as he has spoken to his debtor on the subject several times lately.

"Oh, that beat! Wants to borrow more money from you, I reckon," says Skinner, who has a half-way idea of the relation his late partner bears to Platoff. "Why don't you tell him to come down to your office, if he wants to talk business?—not go running after him. You've no spunk!"

"No—but I've interest—good interest, from the prince!" murmurs Zamaroff.

"And how about the principal,—eh?" laughs the American.

"Oh! I've got good security. She's very ill—she'll die soon!" and with this astonishing remark the Hebrew slips from the office and goes cringing down stairs, where he gets into a sleigh and is driven across the river, to the rooms of his princely debtor.

The American looks after him, gives a low whistle, then meditates: "No wonder Russian business men are despised! That fellow squirms like a cur to a prince. I wonder how much he's lent his nabob?—Anyway, I'm glad the road's finished, and I've finished with Isaacavitch Zamaroff; though no one under heaven could have beat our Slavonian sub-contractors with their own weapons—lying and chicanery—like he. Bet Issy's got good security—trust Issy for that. Darned if he can't cheat anybody but a Yankee!"

In this case Skinner makes a mistake. Zamaroff, ushered into Platoff's apartments, is kept waiting in his study for some little time, before the owner comes to him; he occupies his time in gazing at a photograph which hangs conspicuously in the room. It is that of a young girl about eighteen, apparently in the last stages of consumption. Over this the eyes of the financier seem to gloat.

Upon this scene the prince enters briskly, his eyes giving a curious twinkle as he notes the occupation of the usurer.

"Hello, Zamaroff!" he says briskly. "I sent for you for another favor, old man. Just sign for me a check for two hundred thousand roubles!"

"The amount is very large, your high nobility," mutters the other, after a pause of disappointment. "I had expected you to reduce your liabilities to me, not increase them, to-day;" though even as he makes this speech he gives a squirm of humility.

"Pshaw! isn't your security good enough? I noticed you were examining it as I came in!" returns Platoff, with a grin, that, for the life of him, he can't keep from being a sneer.

"Yes, she must be nearly dead now! Your niece cannot live long when she is like that!" mutters Zamaroff, gazing at the picture. "Your highness will give the same security?"

"Certainly!—and as you say, you won't have long to wait for your money. You know I am heir to half of Ora's estates!—See, I've had the note drawn up all ready for you;" and Platoff points to his open escritoire.

"To be sure! I have examined the will very carefully," returns the Hebrew; and, with a little sigh, and drawing a check from his pocket-book, sits down to fill it up, in the midst of this pausing to examine carefully the prince's note. "Yes, the interest and security is the same; and your ward——"

"Is no better!" murmurs Sergius. Then he says suddenly: "Quick! Make out the check! What the devil are you waiting for?"

This being done, and the check passed to his hands, he says, "Excuse me for a moment;" steps out of the room, sends it by a messenger to his bank, that it may be turned into his account; then, coming back, talks on indifferent subjects to Zamaroff, who is complaining how certain gilded youth of the court circle have treated him, especially one Baron von Hulne, of the Guards, about whom he runs on in something of this style:

"Curse him! the creature has squandered all his money at play; hasn't a copeck, and is in debt for his uniforms to his tailor Mathias Zobeck; for he told me so. Well, as I came here, your high nobility, I passed on the Nevskoi that young beggar driving in his private sleigh, also owed for, and I bowed to him—I, Isaacavitch Zamaroff, four times millionaire, bowed humbly to him, very humbly; and he—may his own saint spit upon him!—grinned and ordered his lackey to return my salute, which the son of a serf did, with a howl of laughter and waving of his cap!"

"Yes," replies Platoff, lazily laughing; "that Von Hulne is an uppish beast!" Then he goes on suddenly—for he judges that by this time the money has been transferred from Zamaroff's account to his own, and has made

up his mind for a desperate move this day—" Isaacavitch, my boy, I've got some good news for you."

" Ha ! "

" She is dead ! " and Platoff grins and points to the picture.

" Dead ! God be praised ! And her estates are worth ten million roubles—one-half to you, and one-half to Prince Dimitri Menchikoff ! " laughs Zamaroff in excitement.

" She is dead ;—certainly ! but she didn't have a copeck ! "

" Oh, that is a joke ! Your niece, the Countess Ora Lapuschkin, was the richest heiress in Russia."

" My niece, the Countess Ora Lapuschkin, *is* the richest heiress in Russia ; but *she* was a consumptive ballet girl and—Quiet ! " For here the Jew utters a horrible cry, and has risen with flaming eyes, as if he would fly at him.

After a moment he ejaculates : " Oh, your high nobility, don't play with my heart ! You know you introduced me to her as your niece, Ora Lapuschkin, long—long before you ever hinted at a loan from me ! "

" Certainly," says Platoff, slowly. " That was—part—of my plan. That poor *ballerina* was dying ; I was kind to her, and furnished the money to soothe her last moments. In return, she simply assumed the name of my niece, at my request—for your benefit."

" And the doctor you sent to see her at Tula only last month—the one I questioned ? " yells the wretched capitalist.

" He was a doctor of the highest standing in Russia. That young lady went to Tula for her health. The doctor was sent by me to attend her, and told you the truth about her. You did not ask him *who* his patient was, but *how* she was !—She was very ill ; but my niece is very well. I'll show you how Ora Lapuschkin looks now ! " With this the prince goes into his chamber and returns with a photograph. As he enters he calls out to Zamaroff, who is making for the door in a feeble, dazed sort of way : " Isaacavitch, old fell, you needn't bolt to the bank to stop my check. It has doubtless been already cashed ! "

At which the wretched creditor utters, in a cry of despair : " My two million roubles ! She will live for-

ever!" and sinks into a chair; for he has seen in Platoff's hand a photograph of divine beauty and rosy *health*.

"Not quite that long; but still, my niece bids fair to outlast us both—" murmurs Sergius, with a grin, "*if something doesn't happen to her!*"

"God of Isaac! You don't mean murder!" whispers Zamaroff, with a pale face.

"Pooh! Not I!" laughs Platoff. "But when she comes of age, my nephew Dimitri Menchikoff means to marry this beautiful creature, and then both you and I, Zamaroff, will be done out of our money."

"Well, how can we stop that?" gasps Isaacavitch.

"How? I'll tell you," returns Platoff, very slowly and very impressively. "I'm not afraid to tell you; for if anything happens to me, your two million roubles go to the devil with me." With this he takes him by the collar—for there is something in his eye that frightens the Hebrew—leads him into a corner of his study (for at that time in Russia every house had its police spies, not seeking for thieves, but for nihilists), and whispers to him the plot that had been fermenting in his brain ever since he learnt the governess of his little ward was a socialist; and it is of such a nature that the Jew utters a shriek of fear, bolts out of his house trembling, and slinks away from Sergius Platoff for over a month; then, driven desperate by the loss of his money, one day comes back to him and says: "I'll play in your comedy; but it must be a comedy!"

"So it shall—a comedy for us!" murmurs Platoff, trying a laugh which dies in his throat; for the little play he had conceived was a very serious business, and, had he not been desperate also, would never have been performed. For the political troubles of that time, while they made Sergius's scheme a practical one, also made it fearfully dangerous, if things went wrong; for by this time, under the influence of several social factors, the more peaceable nihilism had been succeeded by terrorism. This was to a great extent brought about by the influence of the French Commune, whose expiring fires threw human political brands all over Europe, a number of these coming to Russia, and instructing them how to ply the torch and bomb there—among them Hermann Margo, the chemist of the Rue de Maubeuge. This

man had remained at the Mazas prison till the outbreak of the Commune, when the Reds threw open the doors of the jails of Paris and let out on the world the wickedness that the French police had been bottling up for years—to assist them to fire Paris and make a three months' Hades of their capital.

After order had been restored in France, this man came to Russia in search of his sister, bringing with him some curious news in regard to the fate of Auguste Lieber.

These political troubles Monsieur Dimitri was aiding to put down in the good old-fashioned Tartar way; and, having flogged all of one village, men and women, and reported it as crushing an incipient outbreak, he received for this the cross of Vladimir, and promotion and station at the capital, where he now came to make the situation of the prince and his capitalist ally more desperate.

About this time Vera Zassulic set all Russia on fire by shooting down one General Trepoff: not as a nihilist, but as an angel of vengeance, who could not tamely see a police despot flog and torture a young student so unfortunate as to be a political prisoner in his autocratic clutches.

To the eternal honor of the Slavic race, she was acquitted by a jury of her countrymen. To the eternal disgrace of the Russian Government, it was the last jury trial they permitted to take place for many years.

This excitement set Platoff to thinking: "If our own Ora, with the same love of liberty as this Vera Zassulic, would but do some noble deed like her, then her estates would, after her death or banishment, come to me—no, only one-half—the other half to Dimitri! But Dimitri is a police official, like Trepoff. Ah! if Ora were only Vera, who is expatriated, and Colonel Dimitri were but General Trepoff, with a bullet through him—then all would come to me!" This curious conceit coming into his brain, Sergius Platoff, after a long conversation with the banker Zamaroff, thinks he will take a journey to Tula, to learn how it fares with his ward and her governess.

Arriving there one winter night, he gets a surprise: for Mademoiselle de Brian rises from beside the great Russian stove, that is full of burning larch-wood, dressed in the black of deepest mourning.

A few minutes after, they chancing to be alone, he remarks upon this costume; and she says it is for her husband, dead five years before, at Cayenne, and that her brother, Hermann Margo, has brought her the news from Paris. "Hermann has been several years in Russia, but he never found me till a few months ago. I have kept him here for you to give him some position on the estate, my dear prince," she murmurs, with a look that indicates she expects no refusal.

"All right; he's scientific, I believe, if I remember de Vigne's—no—de Verney's letter aright. You will excuse my not recollecting the name accurately; it is some years since I received his epistle. We can make Monsieur Hermann steward, or superintendent, or something," replies Platoff, with a grin.

His grin is a short one; for at Maurice's name Mademoiselle de Brian's lips begin to tremble, and a moment after she bursts forth: "De Verney—the man who betrayed us all! who pretended to love me, that he might betray us! My brother opened my eyes wide as to him. If kind nature but gives me——" Here she checks herself, and mutters: "What nonsense! I'll never meet him again;" then goes on and tells the prince, in a few words, of her husband's fate. The chemist Hermann remained quiet at Mazas; the athlete Lieber, becoming savage and surly under prison rule, one day turned on a warden who had angered him, and before aid could come, nearly strangled his keeper. For this he was promptly tried, and sentenced to the penal settlement of Cayenne for life; there, in those hot, pestilential Guiana cane-fields, the yellow fever came and struck the Alsacian down. "My husband's blood is on that Frenchman's head! and if I—— But why threaten, when I'll never be able to perform?" she says; and awful rage giving way to tears, this young lady, to whom black is very becoming—being in fine contrast to her yellow hair and flashing eyes—leaves the Platoff to go to bed; which he also does; but, though very tired from his long journey, produces from his pocket-book de Verney's letter, a little the worse for age, and reads it very carefully through once more. He thinks, from the account it gives of Hermann, that the chemist may be of use to him, and knows, from the way the governess has looked

at his ward this evening, that Mademoiselle de Brian loves her charge no better than she did when first she came there.

A few days after this, looking at Ora—who has been kept all these years quite as a child, and who even now, though eighteen, wears her hair in one long plait, that falls down her back, after the fashion of the peasant girls of this province, and is still in somewhat abbreviated skirts, that show feet and ankles of marvelous beauty—being scarcely a child, and yet hardly a woman—

Prince Platoff mutters: "The fruit is ripe for plucking!" Soon after, he asks the governess to step with him into his study; there, he makes her a very curious proposition in regard to Ora.

Mademoiselle de Brian at first starts from him, pale and trembling, and mutters: "You must be mad. I shall not play with fire, even to——"

"To destroy her. Think how you hate her. In some way she aided Monsieur de Verney in crushing your plans—in placing your brother and your husband in prison. Through this child your husband died. Eh?"

"She helped him then—a very little!" murmurs the governess.

"But still you hate her. Join me, and if we succeed, ma belle Mademoiselle Marguerite——"

"You will be very rich!" sneers the lady. "And I?"

"I shall be generous."

"For all that risk, you will have to be—VERY!" returns Lieber's widow.

"How much?"

"All!"

"What do you mean?" asks Sergius, surprised.

"I mean, if I am to be your slave, make me your slave!"

"How?" mutters the prince. "Don't talk in riddles!"

"Then make me your wife—wives are slaves in Russia—and when Monsieur le Prince is rich with the spoils of that young lady out there—Madame la Princesse will be rich also!"

"Is that your price?" murmurs Platoff, gazing at the beauty of this woman, which is perhaps the turning-weight in the balance of his mind.

"My only price—my *lowest* price ! I'll not take the awful risk, even for vengeance of her, for less!" mutters Mademoiselle de Brian, with pale face and trembling lips. "We shall be walking very near the brink of the pit ourselves."

"Well," cries Sergius, "I take you at your word; you shall be my slave—and my wife—my beautiful !" and, enflamed by lust for beauty as well as lust for wealth, this horrible old man seizes his helpless ward's governess in his arms, and, in unholy kisses, seals a promise of what should be marriage chaste and pure ; but between these two is an awful bargain for the destruction of the happiness of a child, to whom they both, man and woman, owe protection and defense by every law, human and divine.

After lingering over the beauty of his future spouse, Sergius, with a grin on his wicked old face, whispers into the ear close to his : "Ma belle, we must arrange a little patriotic circle for that young apostle of freedom—eh ? I hope her governess has properly fanned the flame of liberty in her charge's mind ?"

The answer he gets pleases him : "Test her and see !"

So the two walk into the large hall of this country house, and there finding Ora, who is at the piano, singing some old Slavonic peasant hymn with her noble, honest contralto voice, Sergius tells his ward that her governess will soon be her aunt, the Princess Platoff. Then, if it were possible for remorse to come to this woman, she would repent. The girl runs to her, embraces her, and cries : "Dear Mademoiselle de Brian, I had a plan to provide for your comfort after I had come of age and you should leave me, but this will keep you near me forever ;" for, with diabolical art, this woman has won the love, trust, and confidence of Ora, so that her undoing shall be more easy.

The governess, however, only glances at Platoff, and he returns a smile, for he feels his task is now easy.

Some days after this, Sergius, in his bluff, honest, outspoken manner, during the winter evenings, that are now growing rapidly shorter with the coming of spring, begins to tell the girl anecdotes of the political troubles that have already come upon the country ; especially the case that is upon everybody's lips—that of Vera Zassulic.

Here Ora astonishes and delights him, for she says: "I know all about that glory of Russian womanhood—I often dream about her," and goes on about the shooter of Trepoff in so loud a tone that, though she delights the prince, she also frightens him, for police spies are everywhere, and there may be some even in this far-away country house at Tula—and to have harm come to the child now would be to destroy the better half of his plan.

From this time on, however, he gets to descanting on the particular police atrocities of her cousin, Dimitri Menchikoff, and, when the girl shudders and cries out in horror at them, says: "Hush! you forget, Ora, you are criticising your future lord and master—the husband you are to wed next year!"

At this Ora cries out in an awful voice: "Never! That cruel monster! Never!"

Then Platoff lisps: "You forget, my dear, the marriage contract; it is your dead father's wish."

And she answers: "Do you think my dead father would wish his daughter to wed a wretch who would beat his wife as he does his servants? Do you think I have forgotten Feodor, his valet's, screams the last time he was here?" then shivers, and a moment after mutters: "Don't talk of it; don't dare to whisper this to me again! but when the time comes, don't fear, I shall know how to act! My hand shall be free from his cruel clutch, as my heart is now!"

And with her soul making radiant her beautiful though childish face—for she was not yet as fully developed as she became in the next year—Ora Lapuschkin leaves Sergius Platoff very happy and confident.

The spring passes, the summer comes. Mademoiselle de Brian, the governess, is changed into Madame la Princesse Platoff quietly at the little Russian church on Ora's estate. Dimitri somehow finds time from his police duties to run down to his uncle's wedding at Tula, and upon making his adieux to his cousin whispers, "Fair Ora, next summer I expect to attend your nuptials and my own," leaving her in a shiver of fright and disgust, for his tone has been not that of lover's entreaty, but of autocratic command.

These words coming to Platoff's ears, he bites his lips, and arranges for his niece's journeying the next winter to

St. Petersburg for her *début* in the society of that city—for there he has made up his mind the drama he has been concocting must be played in all the awful scenes he has arranged for it.

All this time the social state of Russia is becoming more atrocious, for early in the year a number of police spies are destroyed, and Keyking, the chief of the Kief gendarmes, is stabbed to the heart on the public streets of that city. But these are but preliminary—in August the terrorists give the nation a shock. Mesentzoff, head of the Third Section, is knifed to death in the Nevskoi Prospekt, the most fashionable thoroughfare of St. Petersburg. During broad day, right in that crowded street, while ladies are doing their afternoon shopping, and counter-jumpers are pulling down goods and comparing shades in silks and satins, they slay the head of the all-pervading, all-powerful secret police.

The reprisals of the affrighted Government are awful. Instead of persecuting the political societies now in opposition to the czar, they persecute the whole of Russia—especially its capital. Spies lurk behind each dinner-table of St. Petersburg; all live in suspense, for, in the dead of night or the open mid-day, daughters and sons may disappear, and affrighted parents not dare to ask what has happened to their loved ones; the father of the house may not return to it, and his wife and children be afraid to inquire how the loved head of their home has disappeared from out their daily lives. No man, woman, nor child is safe without a passport, and sometimes not even with one; for the ukase of September has been issued—proclaiming, in time of peace, military law and military trial for all offenses against the Government, and, worse than that, "preventative detention," which means imprisonment *without* trial, for years, for life, perhaps, simply because the police suspect and *cannot prove.*

Into this social hell of St. Petersburg, just at the beginning of 1879, her mind on fire with patriotic love of liberty, young Ora Lapuschkin was brought for sacrifice on the altar of Mammon by her guardian, Sergius Platoff.

Into this same genial, merry hell—for society was laughing over its balls, dinners, operas, theaters, and

winter dissipations—it dared not look otherwise than happy ; sullenness and sadness might be suspected—Maurice de Verney, some two months afterward, came, charged with a special mission from MacMahon, the President of the French Republic, to the minister of France at the Court of St. Petersburg.

Receiving no answer to his letter to General Lapuschkin, the Franco-German War had soon after driven the little Ora from his mind. He had served his country faithfully in that contest, as one great German Uhlan-lance scar across his forehead showed. His wounds had all been flesh wounds ; and, recovered from these, nearly all his wonderful strength and activity of body returned to him. His mind, devoted in the last few years to politics and government, had expanded and ripened. In fact, le Chevalier de Verney, now at thirty-seven, was still the dashing fellow he had been ten years before, only mellowed, and, like wine, improved by age. His honorable scar gave dignity to his merry countenance, and he was as much the rage with the belles of the Third Republic as he had been with the court beauties of the Second Empire.

So it comes to pass, one evening some few weeks after his arrival, at a great ball given by Mrs. S. Wetmore Johnston, who is still living at the palace of the Lapuschkins, and who has invited all St. Petersburg to her *fête*, including the French legation, a young lady in flashing jewels and dressed as a boyard heiress—that is, with Russian extravagance and French taste—comes up to him, and, in unaffected grace, smiles like a sunburst on him, and says : " My old playmate, the Chevalier de Verney ! I recognize you all but the saber cut ! Don't you remember me ? "

" Mademoiselle—certainly—I—last winter, in Vienna ! " stammers Maurice ; but as he looks at her he knows, had he met such beauty before, he would remember it.

" Ah, yes—in Vienna," returns the lady, playfully ; " or was it not at Rome, in carnival ?—perchance I was masked."

A moment after her lips tremble with something more intense than chagrin. She murmurs sadly : " You never remember me ! Perhaps you'll recollect the bear's nest in the Bois de Boulogne."

At this de Verney gasps—" Ora Lapuschkin ! "

Then she cries: "Yes, grown up! I forgive you!"

"Prove it," says Maurice.

"How?"

"By the next turn in this mazourke."

"Not the next; the—let me see—fifth!" laughs the girl. "My first is with Dubroskey, of the hussars; my next with Orloff, of the guard; my third with Andrassy of the Austrian embassy, and my fourth with Higgins, of the Standard Oil. There they are, all standing in a row waiting for me;" for the young countess, being an heiress and a beauty, in her three months in St. Petersburg had become a great belle, and, Eve-like, was taking all the enjoyment she could from her position.

Following her glance, de Verney gazes upon a dashing hussar officer, a giant in the gorgeous uniform of the Preobrajensky, a young Austrian attaché, and Mr. Higgins, whom he had known in Paris. This young gentleman, his father having left him an interest in that great American monopoly, is now *en route* to Baku, to see what danger of competition the coal-oil fields of that place portend to the kerosene trust.

"You'd better take your place in my ranks," whispers the countess, who, after the fashion of her capital, is cutting up her dances into turns of infinitesimal length. A moment after, as he steps into his position, she whispers archly to him: "Perhaps I'll give you the longest, if you dance very well," and is whirled into the crowd of waltzers by the hussar, leaving Maurice gazing at her, as at some fairy vision. Being to-night all tulle, gauze, lace, and dazzling jewels, she looks graceful as a sylph, though her flashing arms and fair white shoulders and bust have the development of magnificent womanhood.

As de Verney stands beside Mr. Higgins, whom he recognizes, he is probably for the moment dazed at his encounter. His eyes follow this dazzling being as she floats in and out among the dancers; his mind goes back to the little girl in the Bois, and he mutters to himself: "By George, I predicted it! but she exceeds prophecy!" The next moment he gives a sudden blush; for into his mind has suddenly come a thought that startles him: "By Heaven! How glad I am that I have never married!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BALL ON THE FRONTANKA.

In a hasty, nervous way, almost as if he feared an answer, Maurice suddenly turns to Mr. Higgins, and says: "The young lady with whom I am about to dance is *still* Mademoiselle Lapuschkin?"

"No," returns the American, "she is not Mademoiselle Lapuschkin."

"No?" mutters Maurice, his face growing anxious.

"Certainly not!" continues Higgins. "She is Mademoiselle *la Comtesse* Lapuschkin! I never omit titles!"

"Of course not," returns the chevalier, a sudden happy relief lighting his face. "Of course not! you're an American."

"It's mighty queer, do you know. You're not the only man who wonders if she is married, before he's introduced. They all take a shine to her at first squint," replies Higgins; "but, though very fetching, from bangs to slippers, I'd never dare to marry the belle of St. Petersburg."

"No?—why?"

"Because she'd make me toe the matrimonial mark too deuced square. How do you think a man would ever dare to stay out all night—at the club or anywhere else—with those great honest eyes waiting for him at home next morning over the breakfast-table? You can sometimes purchase beauty too high, chevalier. For matrimonial purposes give me the trusting little chick who cries in secret, but don't lay me out with a glance when I've been on the loose. Jove! I don't believe a diamond necklace would compromise an escapade for hubby with that girl; and a thousand shares of New York Central wouldn't buy peace if a first-class scandal dropped into the family. You see, I'm quite a philosopher!"

"Certainly."

"Gracious! I do believe she's the kind of wife that would despise me in a year," murmurs Higgins.

"Perhaps in less," thinks Maurice, though he doesn't say it.

A moment after this the American gives him a very queer feeling.

"I believe, though," he runs on, "that big dark chap over there, the one with the stiff shoulder—I saw him get it from that masked wrestler in Paris, long ago—is her coming lord and master. Rumor says so ; and if those two ever struggle for domestic boss-ship—wheugh ! Look at her eyes—see 'em flash now—there's ginger for you!"

The next second, after an incipient sigh, Mr. Higgins murmurs : "He's just the brute to try and conquer her, too ! "

For even to his crude mind the idea of the union of so fair and noble a creature with a man of Dimitri's atrocious character seems horrible. This is not wholly unknown to him, for he now whispers in de Verney's ear: "They say he's one of the *Secret*, and tortures prisoners ! But, for the Lord's sake, don't let out I told you ! " Then runs on aloud again, "Excuse me ! here is my partner !—My turn next, mademoiselle la comtesse !—charmed ! You like the five-step, I think ? " And with this leads off the beautiful girl he has been discoursing upon ; leaving Maurice in a very brown study, but very anxious for his turn also.

It comes at last !—and as he guides her through the whirling crowd of brilliant uniforms and lovely women, and Hungarian music floats through the air to him, stimulating romance and love in his heart, which is still fresh as a boy's—for the first time in his life Maurice de Verney feels Ora Lapuschkin's heart beat against his.

This bliss is but a fleeting one. Though they are both fond of dancing, they both wish to talk ; and in the mazourke, danced with the vigorous vivacity that only the Slavic races give to it, there is too much use for breath to permit any of it for conversation. Therefore, after attempting to do the two things at once, they give up one entirely ; and that is the mazourke.

By the time they have regained their breath, they have got into the great conservatory, or winter garden, as it is called in that country, and without which no grand Russian house is complete.

Here Ora turns and says: "We are very good partners, are we not, Monsieur de Verney ? Our steps go very well together."

"Yes; as we were good playfellows a long time ago," murmurs Maurice.

"Ah, you remember it then! I'm so glad—I feared you had forgotten it entirely," returns Ora. "Grown-up gentlemen have bad memories for little girls."

"Not when they have become such young ladies as Mademoiselle Lapuschkin!" says de Verney, gazing at her with all his eyes; for, backgrounded by the vivid green of some palms and an orange tree in full fruit, in floating gauze, which outlines her noble yet graceful form—with one white arm, exquisite in contour as ever sculptor gave to marble, bare to the shoulder save where the diamonds of her bracelets flash in the light as she carelessly plucks a ripening orange—the girl makes a picture that no man could look on with aught but admiration, though in de Verney's case the feeling is somewhat deeper.

Perhaps his glance brings some curious response to her mind; for as he gazes at her a sudden flush flies up into the young countess's beautiful face and her grand eyes meet his. They are bright with vivacity, vivid with youth, and gay with excitement.

The next instant there is a voice at her elbow, and with a start Maurice sees come into those same lovely eyes the saddest look he has ever seen on human face. Colonel Dimitri Menchikoff is bending over her, and remarking that the first turn in the coming waltz is his.

As he says this, the sadness leaves Ora Lapuschkin's eyes; they become cold, haughty, and judicial. She rises languidly and says, "Yes, I believe so." And in answer to the guardsman's inquiring glance—for, though attached to the secret service, Dimitri still has military rank and promotion, as is the custom in Russia—murmurs: "An old friend of mine! Colonel de Verney, let me present you to my cousin Prince Dimitri Menchikoff."

Both men respond to the introduction,—Dimitri with an affable bow and a remark that he had heard of Monsieur de Verney in Paris, and hoped his visit to St. Petersburg would be a pleasant one. "You come on some diplomatic matter, I believe?" he concludes.

"Yes. I have been sent to consult with the French minister," replies Maurice, returning the salute. As the two leave him for the ball-room, he gazes after them and

sees that the face of the Russian, always cruel, has been made by time harder and more malevolent. Then, his eye passing to the graceful girl at Dimitri's side, de Verney, noting how she seems to shrink from her companion, suddenly wonders if the marriage contract, he remembers Ora's father spoke of, is still uncanceled, and if this is not the cause of Ora Lapuschkin's sorrowful eyes.

The girl has not mentioned the old general, and, not wishing to open an unhealed wound in the young countess's heart, he makes inquiry as to General Lapuschkin's fate from some passing acquaintance, and finds that the old veteran has passed away years ago.

Some half an hour after this, a fan is laid on Maurice's arm, and a soft voice says : " Monsieur de Verney, let me present to you a gentleman you, as a diplomat, should know—the Honorable Cuthbert Beresford, of the British legation."

" Ah ! very happy ! " says Ora's escort, a florid little Englishman of twenty-one. " You're attached to the French embassy, I believe, Monsieur de Verney. As the countess says, *we* diplomats should be always friendly, don't yer know? When two nations are cutting each other's throats, who are *not* fighting ?—the diplomats ! They're trying over their wine and cigars, in a friendly way, to patch up peace. Don't yer see ? "

" I see," returns de Verney with a smile. " You're not only a diplomat but a philosopher, Mr. Beresford."

" Oh ! come now ! You're—awh—quite complimentary—don't yer see ? My remark was a quotation—of course. Never had an original ideah in my life—don't yer know ? "

" Wine and cigars suggest supper," says Ora with a smile, " and I believe——"

" I am to have the honor of taking you there, Mademoiselle la Comtesse ! " interjects Maurice with the easy fib of a man of the world, hoping that is what will please her, and seeing that she would like to get a moment from young Beresford.

" Thank you ! " replies the young lady, and accepts his arm. After they are out of Cuthbert's hearing, however, she suddenly says : " I left you rather hastily a few minutes ago, Monsieur de Verney ; because, to have

refused my cousin the dance he claimed, for your society, would have made him your enemy, and Prince Dimitri Menchikoff is very powerful at present—in police matters. I hope you understand me."

"Certainly. I believe he is one of the heads of the Third Section—but you have no reason to fear him, I presume, Countess Ora."

"No!" replies the girl, flushing haughtily; "I fear no one!" A moment after, she astounds the chevalier, for he thinks he hears her mutter in almost despair: "I am beyond fear now."

Before he can make any reply, mademoiselle astonishes him again. She vivaciously cries: "But I have not asked about your life since I saw you—that's ten years! I don't think that sword-wound unbecoming. It was for your country, and I like patriotic men. You wear the grand cross—tell me how you gained it. Tell me of your life!" rattling on as if she wished to stop thought by speech.

"You have not informed me of yours—ladies first!" interjects Maurice.

"Oh, mine!" says the girl. "My life—well, if the adventures of a young lady who has within three months been put in long dresses,—school-room records, and the life of a Russian country house will please you—yes!" Her manner all this time being artificial, forced, and unnatural, the chevalier thinks; for her eyes are wild, and at times desperate in their intensity, while her hands give one or two nervous movements.

"Your father!" murmurs Monsieur de Verney.

"My father! Oh, yes! You were his friend—his boy friend, he used to call you to me after we came back to this ac—, after we left France. Oh, if we had stayed there! Then my father would not have died; then—but why have vain regrets? Why not tell you without emotion?" says the girl; and forcing herself to calmness, she informs de Verney how her father died but a few months after leaving France, and she has been educated at Tula, and only brought back to St. Petersburg this present winter, to make her bow at court.

"Your father never mentioned receiving a letter from me after his arrival in Russia?" suddenly queries Maurice.

"No, I think not; but it is a long time for me to remember with certainty. Why do you ask?"

"Only that I wrote to him," remarks de Verney. "I, I—presume you had a competent instructress?"

"Certainly! At least, every one says my French and German are very good—and my music. Oh, what an egotist you must think me! It's not right to lay traps for a girl's vanity, Monsieur Maurice; and I—I've only been out for three months, and am, as you must see, inexperienced!" This last is said with a blush and a laugh; but she has called him as she did that day in the Bois de Bologne, and is more like the little countess he remembers than she has been at any time this evening.

"You bring back to me more strongly than ever my playmate of the Bois de Bologne!" mutters Maurice, a sudden spasm of feeling coming to him as he notes her magnificent beauty, and suddenly remembers something. Then he says slowly and meaningly: "Do you recollect the disclosure you made to your father, and that he confided to me?"

"N—no!" replies Ora reflectively.

"Think!" says Maurice, a new light coming into his eyes that no woman had ever seen there before. "Look straight at me and *think!*"

With this, some subtle fire connects his mind—perchance even his heart—and her own.

Ora Lapuschkin gives a short, gasped-out "Oh, yes!" her face grows red in the mighty blush of coming memory, then pale as death, and her lips, trembling, breathe forth: "I—re—member!" She droops her head, and turns it from his gaze.

For a moment de Verney is startled. His words have produced so much greater effect than he expected; the next, some kind of half-crazy joy fills his brain—some sudden intoxication from the champagne, of which there has been plenty, or her beauty, of which there has been more—for, as she gazed on him, there has flowed to his brain this wild idea: "Her child love is her woman's passion!" and brought joy unutterable and triumphant madness to his soul; for revelation has come to him, and he knows that thirty minutes within the charm of that soft, touching voice, and under those great, blue, honest eyes, through which flashes out a noble soul, have

been fatal to a heart that he had thought impregnable and that till now had passed through several cycles of beauties unmoved, and, better still, unsullied and unsoiled.

He bends over her and whispers: "Forgive me; I startled you. I——"

She looks up at him and attempts a little laugh, then says: "One shouldn't be reminded of the follies of youth. Every one says I was a wayward and impulsive child; my guardian, who is coming here, will tell you the same thing.—Prince Platoff, this is my old friend, Monsieur de Verney."

"An *old* friend?" says Sergius, looking hard at Maurice, but bowing cordially. "Why, you've only been three months in St. Petersburg to make friends, ma belle!" for Platoff was very affectionate to his niece about this time.

"She refers to France, I hope, Monsieur le Prince," replies Maurice. "I had the honor to make the countess's acquaintance when she was a child in Paris with her father!"

"Oh!" This is a little start from Platoff. A moment after he goes on: "Monsieur de ——. I beg your pardon, I did not catch your name," though he knows the chevalier's cognomen now, and his signature even better.

"Monsieur de Verney, my uncle," repeats his ward. "Haven't you ever heard me speak of him? You know——"

But here the prince cuts quickly in, and gives Maurice's heart a beat of joy, and Ora's face another blush, for he cries: "De Verney? Oh, yes! you were forever gabbling of him as a child. Maurice, I think she called you. Madame la Princesse, my wife, would be delighted to see you, but she is at Tula just now! Won't you join us at our supper table? We shall be only my niece, Herr Zamaroff the banker, and myself!"

With this, he takes Ora's hand, places it upon his arm, and murmurs: "My niece looks so beautiful to-night that her guardian was tempted to dance himself, but the mazourke is bad for rheumatic joints. Don't forget our supper table, Monsieur de Verney," and leads Ora away.

Sergius thinks it's just as well that de Verney does not know who his wife is. As he walks he meditates, and,

chancing on a brilliant lie, promptly tells it to his niece with proper effect.

"I would not mention to Monsieur Maurice, if I were you, Ora," he whispers, "that Mademoiselle de Brian, your former governess, is now my wife!"

"Indeed! why?"

"Well; Monsieur de Verney was once very much in love with her, and it might hurt his feelings. He wished to marry her, I understood, but she had no *dot;* and, though the young man was very much cut up about it, the affair was broken off."

"Ah!" and the girl's white hand trembles a little on his black sleeve.

Noticing that in some way what he says affects his niece, he goes on and clinches his falsehood by "You remember, it was de Verney's recommendation, or that of his family, which induced your father to engage Mademoiselle de Brian!"

"It was *his!* I remember all about it now. He sent her to us," replies the young countess suddenly.

Then she turns her head away, and, try as he may, Sergius cannot see her face till they sit down at the supper table.

This conversation has the effect intended. For months Maurice never discovers who the Princess Platoff is. He once or twice mentions the subject of her governess; but the girl simply tells him she has had a very capable and noble instructress; for, though she will not admit it to herself, these words of Platoff have made Mademoiselle Lapuschkin jealous of her former governess.

This feeling affects the girl at the supper table, where they are shortly joined by de Verney, who, after being introduced to Herr Zamaroff, who has disfigured himself with diamonds for this grand occasion, sits down beside Ora Lapuschkin, to find her almost a different being to the one who moved from his side three minutes before.

She is now light, almost frivolous, in her remarks, and, when she gets opportunity, cold as ice but cutting as glass to him; giving him at times such telling shots as, "Do all Frenchmen marry for money, and none for love?" ——"I am told now that the most beautiful girl in France is the goddess of liberty, because she is on your new twenty-franc pieces."

At this mention of the goddess of liberty, Zamaroff turns white, Platoff trembles in his chair, and even Maurice—remembering that, this being Russia, spies are everywhere, and liberty a proscribed word—says to her: "Permit a friend's advice—never speak of politics."

"Neither did I!" returns the young lady; "I spoke of beauty, the beauty——. But, excuse me; here comes Cousin Dimitri, looking rather pale, but very savage.—What is the news that makes you seem more irritable than usual, Cousin Dimitri?" and she rises and laughs at a face that is white, but at that moment cruel as a starving Bengal tiger's that scents living prey.

"This is it! This telegram says," mutters the savage, "Prince Krapotkin, governor of Kharkoff, has just been shot to death by a JEW!" Here he glares at Zamaroff, who cringes till his head is level with the table, and the champagne that he is trying to drink is shaken by his trembling over his diamonds on his shirt-bosom.

"Then the assassin has been captured?" remarks Maurice.

"No! He escaped; but I have reason to guess who he is; and when I catch him——" whispers Dimitri.

Here he checks himself suddenly and says: "That is the reason I am called to Kharkoff, and come to bid you adieu for a few weeks, Cousin Ora."

"What was the cause of the prince's assassination?" inquires de Verney.

"The usual one! Krapotkin was one of us—that's all! Soon these murderous fanatics will bag all us boyards!" cries Platoff, as if in despair. "Take care of yourself, Dimitri—good care of yourself, for your own sake and—*Ora's!*" This last is said very earnestly; for, in truth, Sergius would not at this moment lose Dimitri for the world. He has a much better use for him.

As her guardian's concluding phrase comes to her ears, the girl grows very pale. Then, catching de Verney's eye, she blushes to the roots of her hair, and says, indifferently: "Don't hurry your return, Dimitri, on my account. Good-by!" Next, mutters to him with a pleading voice, "For God's sake, be merciful to those poor captives!"

"Ah! won't I!" hisses Dimitri, rage overcoming his Russian *finesse*. "The political prisoners shall pay for

poor Krapotkin's murder ! They are trembling now in the Central prison of Kharkoff—AWAITING ME ! "

At this awful threat against the helpless, Ora Lapuschkin becomes a different being ; her eyes, that were pleading, burn and blaze with a new and strange light. Though only of the medium height, she looks very tall now, and slowly says : " You, of course—need not fear the same fate as Prince Krapotkin, my cousin ? You never ordered political prisoners—even women—to be flogged ? These nih—— These people'll spare you, because you are so gentle, so merciful, so kind hearted ? "

At her speech, which is in two spasms—one of indignation, the other of sneering contempt—the pallor leaves Dimitri's face, and this Tartar torturer blushes. Under her blue, scornful eyes his droop for a moment, with something nearer shame than Menchikoff has ever felt before in his cruel life.

He mutters : " Prison discipline must be preserved ! Even a fool or a woman might know that ! When I come back, mademoiselle la comtesse, I'll assist at your education. Adieu !—Good-by, my uncle !—*Au revoir*, Monsieur de Verney ! " And, suddenly and imperiously clapping his great hand on the Hebrew's shoulder—" Herr Zamaroff, I wish to see you ! "

At this, the financier utters so plaintive a little shriek of terror, that all of them, even Dimitri himself, burst into a laugh, and some people at the next table to them hear it and look round ; for all this time the supper is going on bravely and the champagne is flowing merrily. Kharkoff is hundreds of miles away, and no one in the room but Dimitri as yet knows of the assassination.

" Don't be afraid ! " laughs the Tartar, running his hands through the curls and petting the financier, who has a cold perspiration on his forehead, as a lion might caress a little lamb. " You would not hurt any one ; you are only dangerous to our pockets. I only wanted a loan from you ; I leave to-night in a hurry. Have you a thousand roubles about you, that you'll trust to me till my return ? "

" I'll—I'll give 'em to you, if you never come back ! " cries Zamaroff, eagerly producing and shoving some bank-notes into Prince Menchikoff's hand. " Good-by ! If you die, I won't sue your estate ! "

Hardly waiting for his creditor's words, Dimitri shoves the money into his pocket and hastily strides from the room, pausing in his hurry, however, to say a few words of adieu to his hostess; for the Prince Menchikoff was scrupulously polite.

A few moments after this, Ora begs Monsieur de Verney to excuse her. She will go to her room. She is indisposed.

"You live here, Mademoiselle Lapuschkin?" asks Maurice, in some astonishment.

"Yes. Mrs. Johnston's lease of this, my town house, does not expire till next summer. She was so kind as to ask me to be her guest, and make my appearance in society from the home of the Lapuschkins," replies the girl. Then she concludes, rather haughtily: "No, thank you! my guardian will take me from the supper-room. Good-night, Monsieur de Verney!" for Maurice has sprung up and offered his arm.

He watches her as she bids Mrs. Johnston good-evening, and notes that Mademoiselle Lapuschkin's face has again the same pathetic look upon it as when she heard her cousin's voice earlier in the evening.

Knowing Mrs. S. Wetmore Johnston's powers of perception, and that Ora has been nearly three months her guest, he walks up to that lady—who is in a magnificent French toilet and a very good temper; for her ball, being attended by many of the magnates of St. Petersburg society, is a great success—and, as he makes his adieux, mentions Mademoiselle Lapuschkin as an old friend of his, and tells of their unexpected meeting.

"An old friend! that's lovely, Monsieur de Verney!" cries the lady. "Ora is the success of this winter, and I am at present her *chaperon*. That's glory enough for me. Drop in and see us often! I receive *à l'américaine* —informally. So you won't be troubled by my *chaperonage*. The girl's got the blues, somehow, lately; and there's nothing so good for that as a flirtation. I know that. Come, and I'll prescribe you for mademoiselle la comtesse."

"Perhaps the prescription will be fatal to *me*," murmurs Maurice with a smile, delighted at this easy chance of seeing Ora without the formalities attending Russian social life.

"Oh, I'll risk you!" says the fair Sallie, complacently. "Besides, there are worse fates than being caught on Ora Lapuschkin's hook. The fishes are playing very lively now about it, I can tell you. But excuse me! General Gourko is just coming to say good-night to me. *Au revoir!* and come soon."

So Maurice leaves her hospitable house, and comes down the great stairs to the wide street, where great fires have been lighted on the snow to keep the *ishvoshtniks* warm, this February night being bitter cold.

Furred to their ears and caftaned to their feet, these hackmen of St. Petersburg are grouped about in picturesque attitudes, some warming themselves near the fires, others asleep in their sleighs, save those who are driving to the great entrance to pick up the guests leaving the ball.

De Verney calls his driver, and as he gets in, says: "I suppose it's all right to light up?" producing, with the words, a cigar.

"Yes, your nobility," returns the man. "We don't pass any of the great bridges." For the edicts against smoking in the streets were once very stringent in St. Petersburg, though now somewhat relaxed.

Thus assured, Maurice smokes as he is driven to his apartments on the Sergievskaia, and turns over in his mind two problems. One is: Why did Ora Lapuschkin treat him so warmly when she first met him—so coldly afterward? This he is unable to determine, though it does not make him very downcast; for de Verney knows the fair sex very well, and reasons, philosophically, "that no woman ever loves a man so well that sometimes she is not angry at him—and anything rather than indifference!" The second is: Why her sudden and incomprehensible moments of sadness? He knows the girl despises Dimitri, and that she will never marry him, if Ora Lapuschkin is the woman he thinks she is. Is it money? Has her guardian been robbing her?

The drive to the Sergievskaia is a short one, and his problem is still an enigma to him as he dismisses his sleigh and goes up to his room. Over it he ponders, until finally muttering to himself, "That girl has a skeleton in her closet, but there's a key, and I'll have it; for ——" Here he leaves off problematic possibilities; and,

thinking of the beauty and charms of the noble creature he has gazed upon this night, Maurice de Verney cries out to himself: "How blessed it is to be a bachelor, for then—you can get married!" and with this goes to bed, and thinks of Ora Lapuschkin again.

As for the girl, dismissing Vassilissa, who acts as her maid, she has torn off her ball-dress, thrown it on the bed in careless misery, recklessly tossed her jewels here, there, and everywhere, and in her luxurious chamber of that great palace now paces the floor, moving her hands every few moments in those little, nervous wringings peculiar to despair.

Sleigh after sleigh can be heard to drive away, guest after guest to depart; the lights go out one by one; the vast house becomes silent—but she still walks on, muttering to herself. At last, her eyes chancing to light on a letter in the German handwriting of her former governess, she gives an awful shudder, and whispers to her beautiful image one of the long mirrors of the room reflects back to her:

"Fool that you were to dream love's dream for one single happy second! The man will be cursed who loves you—cursed by your unhappy fate!"

And, thus scoffing herself, she throws her noble form groveling on her bed, crushing the gauze and laces of her ball-dress, and writhing and moaning in such agony as can only come when despair has driven out hope, and the gates of Hades are opening, and the portals of Paradise are shut and locked.

CHAPTER XVII.

IF I FIND A WAY FROM RUSSIA?

Two days after this de Verney calls upon Mrs. S. Wetmore Johnston and her guest at Ora's town house. As he drives up to the great detached building on the Frontanka Canal, now covered with ice, near the Panteleimon bridge, and notes its long façade, roomy carriage entrance, and all the space about it, he knows that it can

hardly be any money trouble that affects the girl; this palace alone is worth a fortune, situated as it is in the fashionable quarter of St. Petersburg, where land is very high.

For he has thought a great deal about Mademoiselle Lapuschkin since the night he met her, and made a very quiet, cautious, and casual investigation as regards the relations that the girl bears to her relatives and the world in general, pumping among others young Beresford, who has called upon him from the British legation the day after his introduction.

That little gentleman is very full of talk, and runs on at a great rate about the success the countess is in St. Petersburg society; remarking, "Ora may suit the general run: as for me, she's too innocent. But you should see her aunt, who was here from Tula a few weeks ago—the Princess Platoff. There's a banger for you! A little more mature, of course, but so bringing! so fetching! so staying! so everything! don't yer see? As a diplomat, she'd suit you to a protocol."

"Indeed!" smiles de Verney, "and why?"

"Because—humph—she—awh—suited me. And we're both diplomatists, don't yer know?"

But though Cuthbert can tell all about Ora's social triumphs, Maurice soon discovers that neither he nor any one else he talks to can tell very much more, save that the young countess was educated at her country place in Tula, and three months ago burst like a sun on Russian society; consequently de Verney is compelled to investigate in person.

It is partly with this idea that he calls so soon after the entertainment, though he has been longing for the young lady's beautiful face ever since he last saw it, and has been all eyes on the two intervening afternoons on which he has driven up and down the Nevskoi Prospekt, hoping to see Mademoiselle Lapuschkin at shopping or some other feminine amusement that will call her to this great promenade.

He is ushered into a reception room, and at first disappointed. His American hostess comes sweeping in, and after the usual salutation says: "I'm awfully sorry, but Ora begs me to tender her excuses to you. She has one of her spells."

"Indeed! What may that be?" asks de Verney, who is unacquainted with this peculiar use of the word.

"Oh! blues, hysteria, headache, tantrums—any ill that's particularly feminine, we call spells in America," says Madame Sallie. "I believe I've got a little one myself," and she wipes a surreptitious tear out of her eyes. In truth, the poor woman has been weeping all morning; her divorced husband, who is not a man of great delicacy, having just taken another bride, and with considerate kindness sent her his wedding cards.

"I'm sorry to hear that," remarks Maurice. "But what particular spell possesses Mademoiselle Lapuschkin?"

"That's what I can't guess! When Ora has one—they come quite frequently now—she locks herself up. Vassilissa, her foster-sister, says her cheeks blush as if with a fever; and Katie, my maid, informs me that she's seen her wring her hands, as if she were at camp-meeting. Katie is a wonderful observer, and up to everything going on in the house. In Chicago she could tell me every morning, to a minute, when my—my late husband inserted his latch—latch-key in the lock, when he was out late at—at night!"

"Ah! your late husband! Permit me to offer my condolences," says de Verney, in that hollow voice which comes to men when they see a woman in distress; for this mention of the recreant Johnston has been too much for the divorced Sally, and she has now a tear in each of her eyes. "I had supposed him dead long ago," continues Maurice, looking at this supposed widow's very gay dress, and remembering her magnificent ball.

"My husband is not dead," mutters the lady, blushing deeply.

"Not dead?" echoes the chevalier.

"No! he's w-w-w-worse!" and Mrs. Johnston gives two little sobs, as de Verney gazes in astonishment at her.

At this moment a radiant vision comes into the room, says, "Good-afternoon, Monsieur de Verney!" and drives all thoughts of Mrs. Johnston's woes out of his head.

It is Ora Lapuschkin, who has just been fighting a great battle with herself, and lost it.

She has said to herself: "I will never see this man again. If he loves me, I shall only engulf him in my inevitable fate; that would be cruel, horrible, dastardly!—*If* he loves me?" Then, wanting to look on him very much, she has laughed at herself, and cried: "Vain one—IF he loves you? Have a few social triumphs turned your conceited head? Faugh! Monsieur de Verney is too much of a veteran not to protect his heart from my allurements. If he could give up Mademoiselle de Brian for her lack of *dot*, he'd hardly risk his liberty for any one else. Besides, I know my duty, and shall do it. What harm is a little friendship—a few short, happy hours—before THE END! I'll see him, if only to prove my strength."

As if in contradiction to these thoughts, she makes a toilet that would charm St. Anthony himself; for Ora Lapuschkin is a true woman, and would not for the world look aught but beautiful to the eyes of a man she loved when a little girl, and is now, though she drives such thoughts away, going to love, in spite of herself, with all her heart and all her soul.

Therefore, she now stands before de Verney, more lovely in the sunlight of the day than she was in the gaslight of the night. She is still robed all in white, but it is some fleecy, clinging stuff, that twists about her figure, and would make her look like a statue, but that her cheeks have two little blushes upon them, and her eyes are unnaturally bright.

She dashes into the conversation in an almost electric manner; asks Maurice how he likes Russian society, talks of sleigh-rides on the Neva, balls, parties, receptions, and mentions that she is going to a dance that evening, given by the officers of the Guards, to which de Verney suddenly remembers he has a card, and demands the cotillion from her in an assured manner that astonishes her, for her favors have been usually sued for, not commanded.

This Maurice has done deliberately. He knows she is very much sought after, and argues that variety is pleasing to woman. She looks at his eager eyes, and is about to say "Yes;" then, remembering her promise to herself, is about to mutter "*No!*" when Mrs. Johnston, who is American, and does not fear to leave a young lady

alone with a gentleman in her own house, rises, and says: "Monsieur de Verney, why not take dinner here; then go to the ball with us?"

"I shall be delighted!" cries Maurice, jumping at the chance.

"Very well. Prince Platoff will be here also, and we dine at half-past seven. Don't forget. You won't mind my leaving you for a few moments, since Ora is here?" With this, after the manner of her country, she walks placidly out, leaving de Verney *tête-à-tête* with the girl.

"You see, Mrs. Johnston accepted my request for your partnership in the cotillion," remarks de Verney, who has half guessed Ora intended to refuse him.

"Indeed!" returns the young lady with a little laugh. "Is my hand for that dance included in Madame Sallie's *menu?*"

"Yes—in the dessert. You're one of the bonbons," says Maurice. "In fact, as your escort to the ball, the cotillion is my right; and in your case"—he is very earnest now—"I shall ever claim *all* my rights—those of this week—that more sacred one of ten years ago. You remember?"

The girl looks at his face; his eyes catch hers, and tell her something that makes her tender. Her lip trembles. Then she suddenly recovers herself, and laughingly cries: "I'll—I'll compromise on the cotillion for this evening."

Having made his first point, Maurice de Verney is too subtle a strategist to attempt another, just at present. After a few more words, he makes his adieux, returns to dinner that evening, and at the ball of the Guard dances the cotillion with this young lady, whose heart has now got the upper hand of her will; for, from this time on, Ora Lapuschkin gives herself up to a short, wild dream of happiness, knowing that it will be a dream from which her waking will be all the more awful for her present joy.

While this man and woman have been growing to love each other, political and police matters in Russia have gone from bad to worse. Late in March General Drentelin, the chief of the secret police, is shot at on the Neva Quay, and police spies are killed as if they were flies. And then one April day, the Monday after Easter, St. Petersburg got a shock; the terrorists have made their first great attempt.

Placing poison capsules in his mouth to insure his own escape from the police, Solovieff has fired five pistol-shots at the Czar of all the Russias in the open street. None of the bullets strike the sovereign, and the poison does not kill the nihilist, though the hangman shortly after does.

Convinced now that his own life is in danger, Alexander turns upon his foes, and, to protect himself, issues such police regulations as no other sovereign did, in time of peace, since the world began.

General Gourko is appointed military governor of the capital ; civil law ceases ; and the celebrated order making all *dvorniks* (house porters) compulsory spies, to report the goings out and the comings in of all who live under their roofs, is issued.

This attempt also brings Dimitri Menchikoff back from Kharkoff ; for the government is filling the capital with police spies, and being desperately afraid of its own people—nihilism having so permeated Russia—has quietly brought over from Paris a number of French *mouchards*, among them, curiously enough, Regnier and Microbe, who have been lured from the police force of their native country by the high wages offered by the emissaries of the Czar.

So a friend and an enemy to Maurice de Verney come near to him at St. Petersburg ; for Dimitri soon grows to hate the chevalier cordially, as he notes the glances the audacious Frenchman dares to cast upon what he has set apart for himself. Le Prince Menchikoff has been watching the wondrous beauty of his cousin. He already knows her great wealth, and now imagines he is strong enough with his government and Czar to claim the fulfillment of the marriage contract of their childhood, and, despite her tears or entreaties or haughty disdain, to win and wear Ora Lapuschkin, willing or unwilling, in the Eastern Tartar fashion, his ancestors, two centuries before, compelled the beauties of the Ukraine to their nuptial feasts and vows.

Evidences of his demands soon appear on the girl's face. De Verney notes that her eyes have at times a desperate look, but never guesses the reason; for he knows the woman he is in love with has too much spirit to wed even the Czar himself did she not love him ; and her

heart, he fondly thinks, is his: her eyes have said it, even if her voice has not.

He devotes himself to the discovery of this secret trouble of Mademoiselle Lapuschkin, and for this purpose gains the faith and trust of her foster-sister, Vassilissa; but the sturdy peasant girl can tell him nothing, save that her loved mistress is unhappy. He cultivates Prince Platoff, also Dimitri himself, and to these confirmed gamblers loses some thousands of roubles at the tables of the Imperial Yacht Club—and still knows no more.

So the days run into May; and winter, with its snow and ice, changes to early spring even in this northern capital. Carriages take the place of sleighs on the streets, the beautiful islands of the Neva grow green with springing grasses and budding trees, until one day the river ice, with a grand noise and crash, breaks up, and floats out in great cakes to the Baltic, leaving the city cut in two by a noble stream of rushing, clear blue water—the Neva that the Russians love and fear! for it makes much of the beauty of their capital; and some day, when the wind is right and a high tide and breaking ice come all together, it may destroy it. Twice it has nearly done so, and some time it may succeed.

Just at the end of this month of May, Maurice de Verney gets the first little inkling of the terrible position in which the woman he loves is placed; it is the merest suspicion, but gives him an awful shock. Afterward, to his inquiring, evidences come more rapidly and more certainly.

Chancing one night at the Imperial Yacht Club to be playing, as was his habit, with the Princes Platoff and Menchikoff, and the game running against Dimitri, this latter gentleman, losing his temper, cries: "You have the best of me to-night at this game, Sergius; but next month you'll have to borrow more money from Herr Zamaroff, who, I hear, has become your banker."

"Indeed! And why next month?" lisps Platoff, with a rather peculiar look in his eyes.

"Next month I marry!" says Dimitri, pointedly; "and executors account to the husband."

"You are certain—you will not be refused?" returns Sergius, smiling, though the grin shows his teeth and is something like a snarl.

"Sure! She *dare* not refuse! By St. Valdimer, she dare not refuse ME!" And he laughs back in old Platoff's face. Next, says: "By that time I presume you will be going back to France, Monsieur de Verney?" And with this parting salute to both his opponents, the imperial guardsman and sous-prefect of the secret police slouches out of the card-room.

"That was a little shot at you, my dear chevalier," sneers Sergius, though Maurice notices that his lips have grown pallid and gray with some hidden fear.

De Verney does not reply to this; he is thinking, Why did Dimitri say she *dared* not refuse him? If he has guessed the courage of Ora Lapuschkin aright, he knows she would dare anything rather than marry a man that each day she despises more and more; for Dimitri Menchikoff has brought a very bad reputation back with him from Kharkoff, where some hundreds of prisoners have somehow died of privation in the Central prison there, during his last visit.

Meditating on this he strolls to his apartments on the Sergievskaia, and there chances to meet young Beresford, who has dropped into his rooms for a chat.

Maurice is rather pleased to see him, as he likes the little Englishman very well, though he is not impressed by his intellect. Their conversation drifts along on one thing or another, Mr. Beresford, with English candor, expressing himself on the beastliness of the present police regulations, and particularly damning one order of General Gourko, the military satrap who at this moment holds St. Petersburg in his iron grasp.

He says: "Look at that cursed edict that forbids man, woman, or child to be out after nine o'clock at night, without a permit stating where they are going and what they're doing, don't yer know! Of course it does not matter to us diplomats, who can get general permits by the asking, don't yer see—but it must be cursed disagreeable for the Russians, I should think. I wonder if Mademoiselle Lapuschkin had one the other night?"

Here de Verney, who has been listening to him in a dreamy way, suddenly wakes up and asks: "What do you mean?"

"Why, she was out after that time—eleven o'clock, I should think—and they'd have taken her in, if she

hadn't a permit. Of course, two minutes' explanation at the police-station would have settled the matter; but it would have been deuced unpleasant for a young lady, don't yer know!"

"Of course mademoiselle was with some friends?"

"No—that's the funny part of it!"

"You must be mistaken," says the chevalier shortly.

"Not at all; she was just going into her own house. She was heavily wrapped, of course, and was let in the side entrance, the *dvornik* being asleep at the main one."

"Pooh! your idea is absurd. It must have been one of the servant-girls," remarks Maurice, biting his lips.

"The idea may be absurd; but my eyesight is first-class—and——"

"And I hope you'll not repeat your incredible tale to any one else. People might even think ill of her!" interrupts de Verney, sternly and suddenly.

"Not I, by Jove! Every one respects the young countess—nobody more than I, don't yer know!" returns Beresford.

"Then, as a favor to me, mention this to no one else, will you?" asks Maurice.

"Certainly, my dear fellow—and I'll take a little more of that *eau-de-vie* of yours. By Jove! how your hand is trembling! and I never guessed you had nerves before. These Russians are too hard-headed for you at the yacht club; they'll drink you to death," says Beresford, compassionately; for de Verney's hand has shaken a little as he has passed Cuthbert the brandy.

The next day Maurice calls at Mrs. Johnston's, and, the ladies not being at home, gets an opportunity to see Vassilissa in private. This girl, he knows, adores her mistress and foster-sister. Looking straight at her faithful peasant face, and knowing he can trust her, he comes straight to his point.

"Vassilissa," he says, rather carelessly, "why does not Mademoiselle Ora take you with her when she goes out at night?"

At this, the woman's face gives such a twinge and grows so pallid that he knows Beresford's eyes have not deceived him.

Being sure of his game, he now goes on: "Do you

think I'll look calmly on when she is in danger of arrest ? for—for I love her ! "

He gets no farther ; for here Vassilissa gives a short cry, comes straight up to him, and gasps, under her breath : " You love her ?—Swear to me by the seven sacraments of our holy Russian Church that you love her ! Swear it ! " and seizing his arm she looks at him with all her honest face.

" I love her ! I swear it, by the Redeemer of us both ! " cries Maurice.

" Then I'll tell you—you should be true to her—for "—here she gives Maurice, in all the doubt and uncertainty of that awful time, a mighty joy—" for I think she loves you ! and, God help her ! I fear she needs every friend ! This is all I know for certain : my mistress is in some fearful trouble, something that keeps her from sleeping, something she tries to throw off, but will come back to her. As you say, she did go out the other night, for three hours. I don't know why. I only fear it is something that might make her like the two daughters of—you know who I mean—that high minister whose children, two girls, were stolen out of his house at night by the police three weeks ago ; and, though he is in despair, and his wife has gone insane, they'll never see them again. Mind you, I don't know; because if I try to follow her, or speak of this to mortal soul—how I let her in at the side entrance, unknown to the *dvornik*, who must report every going in and coming out—she says I'll be sent away from her. But I fear this, for Ora dared not ask for a permit, and went without a passport. For the love of Heaven don't tell her, or she, whom I love as a slave and as a sister, 'll never forgive me—I who have betrayed her to protect her !—Save her !—Save her from herself !—Save her from the fate of all who are arrested, these cruel days ! Ah ! now I know you love her and will serve her ! " for, as this woman has gasped and sighed this out to this man, something has come into his face that means that if Ora Lapuschkin goes down in this fight between fanatics and despot, Maurice de Verney will fall by her side.

Then, Vassilissa going away after he has asked her a few more questions, he sits down to await the coming of the ladies, and thinks the affair over, knowing that

anything he does must be done quickly—to be successful.

The two ladies come in from some gay reception; for the government has ordered the newspapers to stop all remarks on the attempt on the Czar, and it has been hinted officially that those who look happiest will be considered the most loyal. So, with this pestilence of the police upon it, when no one knows what day may bring him to despair, by loved ones silently departed—to prison, Siberia, the mines, or the executioner—for this affair is very silent, only, as in the plague, each day some people disappear without notice or commotion; St. Petersburg is, on its surface, merry and laughing, and its balls, and theaters, and routs as many and well attended, and the champagne flows as merrily and the laugh is as loud, as if the land were not under that "white terror" of the police, which is more awful than the "red terror" of the nihilist!

After a few words, Mrs. Johnston gives Maurice a suggestion. She says: "I'm going to get out of here; I'm going to Paris."

Neither de Verney nor Ora asks her why; but after a second Maurice suggests suddenly: "Why don't you take Mademoiselle Lapuschkin with you?"

The girl, who has come in quite red from the air—for June breezes are bracing in St. Petersburg—but on seeing de Verney has grown suddenly pale, now flushes up with some sudden hope, but a moment after becomes pale again, and says slowly: "I have thought of that before; but I do not think you will be able to obtain for me permission from the government to leave Russia. You know it is always necessary to obtain that; now, more than ever."

"Pish!" cries Sallie; "as if they dared refuse one of your rank!"

"My rank will perhaps be one of the obstacles," remarks Ora, as if she knew there was little or no hope.

"There's nothing like trying," says Maurice. "You'll take charge of her, won't you, dear Mrs. Johnston?"

"With a great deal of pleasure!" cries the lady.

"Very well, I'll make out the application;" and de Verney sits down and in a few minutes writes the necessary request. "Will you please sign that?" he says,

presenting the paper to the young lady, who has been abstractedly drawing off her gloves. He offers her the pen, but she mutters, "What use?"

"For my sake!" whispers Maurice, with both tongue and eyes.

Without a word she takes the pen he holds to her, and signs her name.

"I shall get this countersigned by your guardian. You'll have the permit to-morrow morning;" and he turns to leave the room.

"Do you think so?" cries the girl suddenly, running after him. "Do you think so?"

"I hope so!" says de Verney. "And if not?"

"If not—the other thing!" and she winces, but smothers her emotion by a curious little mocking laugh; not at Maurice, but at herself.

De Verney himself goes hastily away, with the document in his hand, and, finding Prince Platoff at home, tells him his niece's wishes and asks his signature.

"Ah! you want to get her away from Dimitri; but he'll not let you, my poor fellow!" remarks Sergius; "though I don't mind putting my name on the paper;" which he does, and Maurice takes it up to the *État Major*, that great Russian foreign office on the Admiralty square, and leaves it with the proper official.

He has a faint hope in his heart that the necessary permission may be granted before Prince Menchikoff learns of his cousin's intended departure; and the next morning calls to see if such is the case, finding Mrs. Johnston, Ora, and Platoff in the *salon*. As he comes in he hears the American lady exclaiming indignantly: "This is a pretty country to live in! Give me the land of the free——"

The "free" dies away in a gurgle; for Sergius has promptly clapped his hand over her mouth, and muttered, "Excuse me! but do you want us all to sleep in prison? You must be mad, madame!"

"So I am!—it's an outrage!" and Mrs. Johnston tells Maurice that Ora's application for passports for foreign travel has been refused.

"Yes, they have clipped the little dove's wings! They will not let her travel, my poor chevalier, till she is Madame Dimitri," murmurs Platoff; for this wily old

gentleman rather guesses what kind of a feeling there is between de Verney and his niece, and is now trying with all his subtle power to make Ora desperate.

Looking at his beautiful niece, as she stands there in an exquisite morning-gown, a picture of pallid beauty—for the girl is very pale this morning, and would look crushed were it not for a curious wildness in her eyes, that blaze like blue diamonds—Sergius thinks to himself: "Another little spasm of despair, and she'll be ready to do the deed I have prepared for her! That Frenchman, whose gaze always makes her blush and tremble, is the fellow to do the business for me. Gad! How handsome and mournful he looks also! It's a pity; they'd make a pretty couple! but every one for himself in this wicked world!" Then this cunning old sinner contrives to get Mrs. Johnston from the room, upon a plea of business with himself, concerning the lease of this mansion that she is about to give up, and so leaves the two alone gazing at one another.

The young lady is the first to break the silence. "I—I presume you'll be returning to France soon, Monsieur Mau—Maurice?" she begins, a little catch in her voice, as if the words were very hard to utter. "Your diplomatic mission is, I—I believe, finished."

"That was settled a month ago," returns de Verney. Then suddenly coming up to her, he says, pointedly: "I shall never go back to France till I take some one with me!" and would seize the little white hand she raises as if to warn him off.

Somehow, quick as he is, this hand eludes him. Red flies into her face, till her cheeks are as if they were rouged—only much more lovely, for the brush of nature always excels that of art. Her eyes, that were flashing so desperately a moment before, become very sad and drooping, and Ora Lapuschkin, almost like a frightened child, shrinks from him.

"What—do you—mean?—Please let my hand alone," she utters faintly; for de Verney, in spite of her, has got possession of this member now, and does not let it go.

"What do I mean? You know what I mean! Don't eyes speak, as well as lips? What have *mine* told you since that night when, in this very house, I first saw you as a woman?—that I loved you!" whispers Maurice; and, ten-

derness for this lovely and drooping creature filling his soul, he would take her to his heart.

But she struggles away from him again; and now, gazing straight at him, into her eyes comes a noble but hopeless look; and she would strike him with despair, if he would but let her.

She cries: "Let me bear my doom alone! Do you think I'll let you go down with me? Don't you know that you are daring to hope for a slave of the Czar, whom he has set apart to be the bride of his faithful policeman, the Prince Dimitri Menchikoff?"

This last is said in an awful, laughing way, as if she were jeering both de Verney and herself.

"I know that Dimitri wants you; but I want you, too—and I'll have you! Give yourself to me, and in spite of policeman and Czar together, by Heaven! I'll have you!" mutters Maurice between his teeth; and would seize upon and kiss this creature of his adoration, who is now half within his arms; for her words have called into his mind a picture that makes him as desperate as she is.

But she breaks from him and cries: "No! If you kissed me you might feel you had a right to me; and in trying to save me"—here she comes to him and whispers in his ear—"you would be destroyed yourself!"

"I'll risk myself for you—give me the right—I love you! Do you love me? Dear one, answer! if not by words—by looks—by your eyes—and I'll take you from this infernal country!"

But she turns her face away from his, and mutters: "How? You are mad! Without a passport I could no more leave St. Petersburg—than I could fly from that awful prison over there!" And pointing toward the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul, some new thought comes to her, and she shudders and shivers as if she felt even now the breath from its damp cells upon her limbs.

"I know every station is guarded—and passports are demanded at every police office on the route!—Yes, by rail impossible!" whispers de Verney; "but"—here a sudden hope comes to him, and he cries joyously, "if I find a way from Russia, you will take it?"

"Yes!" gasps the girl. And she gives him joy in return; for she says: "If I leave without the Czar's sanction, I shall lose my estates—and—have nothing!"

"Nothing but yourself!" cries Maurice. "That's all—yourself! bride of my heart! Yourself, Ora!" and would take her lips as proof of her love. But, though her eyes are full of tears, again determination comes to this poor creature, battling between what she knows is her love and what she thinks is her duty, and she cries to him: "Not yet! You shall not link your fate to mine till I feel it will not destroy you! Make what plans you can to take me out of Russia; then, if I escape, I am yours, body and soul—love of my life! but I'll not have you link your fate to mine, or hold your promise, till I am safe! I offer this, not a bribe, but so that you can feel yourself free to leave me to my fate, without remorse; for I know my chance of flight is nothing—*nothing!*—NOTHING!! surrounded, as I know I am, by spies that Dimitri has put about me to show me how he loves and values me! When will you see me again? Make it soon; you have little time—less, perhaps, than you suspect!"

To these despairing words, Maurice mutters shortly: "I shall have all arranged by to-morrow—to-morrow, at twelve o'clock! I can hardly be ready before then."

"Then, till then good-bye!" and she would run from the room, as if she feared to trust herself; but at the door she falters and turns toward him, as if she dreaded this parting was their last.

He has turned his head away from her, and is trying to drive love from his brain, so that he may think calmly and logically on his task, that seems almost impossible; when—all else but love leaves him, and for one bright second the world is joyous to him on this awful day: two violet eyes, beaming like suns from out a mist of tears, look into his; two soft and tender arms clasp themselves round his neck; two lips, that would be a fairy's did not passion make them a woman's, are pressed lightly, and but once, on his!

"That is to make you sure, king of my heart, that I, who am yours, will never be aught to other man! By that, if I never look on you again, you'll remember Ora Lapuschkin, Maurice—forever!—Maurice!"

His name is a sigh that is floating back to him through the open door; but though he runs to it—calling her name—she has passed away from him. He mutters an awful oath, and says: "It shall not be forever!" Then,

fighting down passion, he becomes outwardly calm, as he passes from the house ; for Maurice de Verney knows that only worldly wisdom will solve the problem upon which his future life depends.

CHAPTER XVIII.

OLGA'S DATCHA.

CALLING a *droski* he drives straight to the French Embassy, on the Dvortzokaia Quay—thinking as if for his life all the while. Arriving there, the attaché in waiting shows him in to the minister of his country.

"I've been waiting to see you for the last hour, de Verney," says his Excellency, motioning him to a seat. "Our president writes me that he wishes you in Paris. There's one of those periodical rows in the *Corps Législatif*, and I imagine Marshal MacMahon thinks you can be of some service at home. Your business with me has been all settled. You look quite ill.—When can you leave ?"

"I have not been well for some little time ; but a sea voyage would make me all right. I would return to France to-morrow, but no steamers sail from Cronstadt on that day."

"If you take my advice, you'll stick to the land ! These Baltic packets are not like Atlantic liners ; and as for their cooks——" Here his Excellency makes a grimace.

"I know that ; but you have a steam yacht at Cronstadt, have you not ?"

"Yes—not a very large one."

"But seaworthy enough for summer sailing ?"

"Perfectly seaworthy ! She's just gone into commission. Do you want to go to France in her ?".

"Yes ; very much. Keep your embassy flag still upon her, and I'll charter her from you for a month. You'll hardly have time to go sailing till July."

"Well," returns the minister, "she's not provisioned for a sea voyage."

"Oh, I'll do that to-day, and be ready to-morrow !"

cries de Verney enthusiastically. "Just give me a note to your sailing-master, and I'll be well before I reach France."

"The very thought of sea air seems to make you better," laughs his Excellency. "Just tell one of the clerks to write the letter to my captain, and I'll sign it. Pay the expenses of the boat, and you can have her; but you must send her back by July!"

"I will do more: I'll refit her in France before I return her. She only draws eight feet of water, I believe?"

"Eight and a half, I think," says the minister. "You're becoming a sailor already!"

"I only wanted to know if I could get her up the Neva," remarks the chevalier. "I'll have her at the English quay to-night, below the bridges, and be ready to leave to-morrow. You'll send one of the attachés to get the clearance papers from the custom-house for me in your own name, won't you? I shall be so extremely busy, your Excellency, and am more than obliged for your kindness!"

"Certainly; but you need not thank me. In giving you a sea voyage, I'm only doing my duty to our party. We can't afford to have you sick, chevalier. You'll come and see me before leaving? I may have some private letters to give you," remarks the minister.

"Of course," returns Maurice; and, half an hour afterward, thanking Heaven that he has the ear and friendship of the French minister, de Verney, with the letter to the captain of his Excellency's yacht in his pocket, is on the railroad for Cronstadt, the main seaport of St. Petersburg, where all large cargoes for the capital are delivered and received, there not being sufficient depth of water in the Neva to permit vessels of great draught to come up from the Gulf of Finland.

In an hour and a half more he is at that place; and that night having, by big bribes to the captain and crew, and intense labor on his own part, got the yacht ready for sea—except her water, provisions, and a *chef* to cook them—he comes up the Neva in the fleet little vessel, which is called the *Sophie*, after one of his Excellency's children, and at midnight is moored to the English quay, St. Petersburg.

The yacht papers being looked at by the proper officers, and the crew's passports and his own proving satisfactory to the police, de Verney goes to his lodgings in the Sergievskaia, and orders François to pack their baggage and next morning get it on board the yacht—his own passport to leave Russia being already at his hand, it having been obtained by the embassy and sent up to his apartments during the day.

This being done he goes to bed, thoroughly worn out; for the excitement and labor of the last few hours have been immense; though now he is quite hopeful, for this is the plan of action he has formulated in his mind:

The *Sophie*, being a pleasure boat, and bearing the flag of the French minister, will be subject to but little scrutiny, even at this time, by the Russian police. His passport is *en règle* for him to leave St. Petersburg. Why should not Ora, accompanied by Vassilissa, or, better still, Mrs. Johnston, for the sake of that respect all men wish to exact from the world for the women they intend to honor as their wives, drive to the English quay and come quietly on board? If any questions are asked by policemen on the dock it will be easy to state that the ladies are on an excursion to the islands—part of the city for which their passports are good—and, once under way, in an hour they will be on the open waters of the gulf—under the flag of France! "They might telegraph to Reval, at the head of the gulf, but I don't think they'd do it; and if they did, it would take a fleeter revenue cutter than any I think the Russians have to catch the *Sophie*. At all events, it's my only chance, and I'll take it," he thinks. He has at one time thought of trying to get the French minister to consent to his marriage to the girl at the embassy, but has put away the idea, as he knows his Excellency would never permit a performance that would lessen the cordiality then existing between France and Russia, and that, after all, the embassy flag could not protect a subject of the Czar, which, under any circumstances, the Muscovite Government would be sure to consider Ora.

"If I broached that wild idea to him, I lose the use of his yacht—that would be all. That yacht's my only chance; but it's a fair one;" and with this de Verney

goes to sleep for a few hours, knowing if he gets to sea he will have but little sleep next evening.

At six o'clock in the morning he is on the *Sophie* again, and under his directions the supplies and water are got on board.

Directing the captain to get the boat under full steam, he drives to the French Embassy, gets the yacht's clearance papers, that have been already obtained from the custom-house, and some private communications the minister intrusts to him ; and, with heart beating quick with hope, Maurice de Verney ascends the steps leading to Ora Lapuschkin's house. It is twelve o'clock, which is the appointed hour.

The *dvornik* responds to his call. He asks for Mademoiselle la Comtesse.

"She has gone away."

"*Away?*" gasps Maurice.

"Yes; last evening, with her guardian, maid, and her aunt, the Princess Platoff, who had just arrived."

"Then please give my card to your mistress, and tell her I wish to see her for a minute."

"That is impossible, Monsieur de Verney," says the man, who knows Maurice very well. "Madame Johnston left this morning for Paris."

"You are sure ?"

"Certain ! I looked at her passport, as the police now require me to do. The last of her trunks went two hours ago to the Wilna railroad station. She left in a hurry," mutters the *dvornik*, with a grin; for the outspoken Sallie had once too often expressed herself strongly regarding the present police measures of the capital ; and when she asked for her passport it was hinted to her that she had better leave Russia immediately, a request that she had acted upon with Western common sense.

"Then—there—is no message for me?" says de Verney, quietly slipping a ten-rouble bill into the man's hand.

"Oh, I forgot !" replies the *dvornik*, pocketing the money. "Certainly, Mademoiselle la Comtesse gave me this for you ;" and he produces a small envelope, on which de Verney's name is written.

Turning away from the small, piercing eyes of this man, Maurice tears open the letter ; and for a moment

the bright June sun grows dark in the heavens to him, though there is still light enough to show him these words, in the handwriting of despair:

"Farewell!—

"ORA LAPUSCHKIN."

Afraid of spies; afraid her letter would be read by others; afraid of engulfing the man who loved her in her own ruin—she had written simply what he read, in writing nearly blotted out with tears that he knows have fallen from the eyes he loves.

He staggers down to his *droski*, and mutters to the driver Prince Platoff's address.

In the carriage, for the first few minutes he is too stunned to think. The blow has come so suddenly that even now he does not fully realize it; for he cannot bring himself to believe that she dare not see him for fear of engulfing him in her own fate. He will not believe that—at least not yet!

He gets to Platoff's rooms, and there learns nothing, save that Sergius has gone into the country for a few days.

"Where?"

That the servant cannot tell.

"Tula?"—He gives the man some money.

"I hardly think so, sir," replies the man, anxious to earn his *douceur*.

"Why not?"

"Because Madame la Princesse Platoff arrived from Tula yesterday."

"Ah!"

"Wouldn't monsieur like some refreshment?" suggests the servant. "You look sick; or is it the heat of the sun?"

"I'll do very well in a moment," mutters Maurice; and he gets down the steps again, and tells his driver to take him to his rooms in the Sergievskaia. He must have time to collect himself, the blow is so sudden and so hard.

This the *ishvostnik* is very glad to do, and get rid of him; for, on Maurice getting out, the Russian says: "Pay me in silver;" which being done, he puts the money under his seat, and going home boils the coins in vinegar; for he thinks—such is his sudden pallor and faintness as he

staggered from Ora Lapuschkin's doorway, the sweat of agony on his brow, and his peculiar appearance since that time—that de Verney has the plague—of which there is some talk at this time in St. Petersburg—and is afraid of the infection.

At home, to François, who has just returned from the yacht, Maurice says hoarsely: "Did no one call for me yesterday, between noon and midnight?"

"No, sir," replies his servant, looking at him astonished.

"There was no message—letter—nothing? And you were here the whole time?"

"There was nothing except your passport, sent up from the embassy; and I was here every moment."

"Then go to the *Sophie* and bring back a valise, and clothes for a few days. Tell the captain to keep his fires banked and the boat under short steam—I may leave at any moment."

"Yes, sir;" and François goes quickly out, leaving de Verney in deeper gloom; for he had had a hope that Vassilissa might have sent him some word—knowing that the girl trusts him. Even yet he expects from her a message, and waits here for it; for it is to this address Vassilissa will send—if she sends anything.

When François returns with his clothes, he charges him as follows: To answer every summons at the door, day or night, in person; not to sleep till he returns, but in case any message comes, to raise the blind of his center front window half way up. He will drive past every half hour or so, and if he sees it raised he will come in.

Then he goes out, and visiting all of Ora's and Platoff's friends that he thinks likely may know her present location, he pumps them casually on this subject, though it is desperate hard to keep his lips laughing, and his anxiety from breaking forth.

But they all still think Ora Lapuschkin is with the rich American lady, in her palace on the Frontanka Canal, and chat to him of past and present gayeties till he almost loathes the sound of human voices.

Each time he has driven past his rooms the center curtain has been down. He now returns to them, and getting no news from François—anxiety overcoming prudence for a few minutes—he orders his *ishvostnik* to the office of Prince Dimitri, who he knows can tell him,

if he wishes to, where Ora Lapuschkin and her guardian have gone.

The *droski* driver looks askance at de Verney as he gives him this direction; but, after crossing the Panteliemon bridge, and getting as far on his way as the Michael Theater, the man stops and says his horse is tired, and that Maurice will have to walk the rest of the way; which de Verney does, thinking perhaps the *ishvostnik* is correct, for he has kept him busy this afternoon—as if a Russian *droski* horse was ever tired so long as his driver could gain a copeck by the beast keeping on his feet? The truth of the matter is, that Maurice's rapid wanderings about the town this afternoon have frightened the man; and his last direction, to the office of one of the heads of police, has been too much for the fellow's nerves.

It is only a few minutes' walk, however; and though the streets are dusty, for it is now the beginning of June, de Verney is too engrossed to notice this, and is soon at Dimitri's office.

Here he is compelled to wait; for Prince Menchikoff is engaged at present, one of the clerks politely informs the chevalier.

A few moments after, Dimitri opens his door to dismiss a pale, haggard-looking woman of about forty. She is not crying nor sobbing, but there is an expression on her face that means more than tears. This person, who has the dress and manner of a lady, staggers out; but, after getting from the door, gives a kind of gasp and catches Dimitri's arm, and falling on her knees, as de Verney, and the attachés, and clerks, and underlings look on, moans: "My God! Why don't you let me see my daughter?"

"I have told you that is impossible," remarks Dimitri coldly. "Perhaps when you call again."

"When shall I come?" says the woman eagerly.

"Perhaps in a year or two," suggests the official.

"A year or two more! You'll keep my daughter in solitary confinement a year or two more!" cries the mother. "My God! my little Natalia 'll go mad! Why don't you try her? Try her—she can prove her innocence. *Try her!*"

"That's the reason we don't try her," sneers Dimitri. "We want a confession from the young lady; and the solitude of 'preventative detention' will loosen her tongue.

She'll stay there till she confesses. Take this woman away!" for the poor creature is moaning, groveling at his feet, and trying to kiss his hands for mercy for her offspring, who is to be in that awful silence which drives sanity from the brain, till the girl confesses to a crime the heads of police know that they can never prove against her.

"Ah, Monsieur de Verney!" cries Dimitri, seeing Maurice; "come into my office and have a cigar. What can I do for you?" addressing the chevalier very cordially.

"No, thank you; no cigar," replies de Verney, accepting the invitation to enter Menchikoff's private office, however. "I only called for some information. I am going to Paris shortly."

"Yes, I know—*very* shortly," interrupts the official. "Better change your mind and have a cigar. No? Well?"

"Well, as I have two or three I. O. U.'s of Platoff—you understand, the Imperial Yacht Club—and as he is out of town, I thought I would ask you for his address, so that I could write to him."

"Ah, you outsiders think we policemen know everything; but we don't!"

"I know that very well, also. I was once connected with the secret police of the Third Empire, myself," returns de Verney.

"Ah ha! Then you must know that we of the Third Section are often ignorant; but if you will write, I'll give Platoff your letter, when I learn his location," murmurs Dimitri.

"If you don't know it now, your policemen are not doing their duty, under the present regulations," replies Maurice, who knows Menchikoff is lying to him.

"Yes, they're lazy rascals," laughs Dimitri. "Leave the letter for me to-morrow; I'll send it to him when I know Platoff's address. So you are about to leave us? I'm not sure but that it is a wise move, on your part. You don't look well, my dear de Verney. This climate of ours is very trying to foreigners; it's decidedly unhealthy—for *some*. I shall be in Paris myself, next winter, with Madame Dimitri. You know who she will be! Call upon us in Paris, my dear chevalier."

"You feel sure you will be in Paris?" says Maurice, steadying his voice, after this telling shot from the Russian.

"Yes!" says the other, laughingly; then his face becomes gloomy, and he mutters: "if they let me live!"

For the nihilists had at this time posted placards up all over St. Petersburg, condemning the heads of police to death; and this had so frightened Zuroff, the prefect of the Third Section, that he had resigned; and Dimitri, who was of sterner nature, had taken his place, and was now, consequently, under sentence of death, from the Russian National Committee. As this body had an awful way of carrying out its sentences, in unexpected hours, places, and modes, even his Tartar nerves are shaken; and he smiles no more at de Verney, as he bids him "*Bon voyage!*" and says: "I'll convey your regrets to her!"

As for Maurice, the very confidence of Menchikoff frightens him. Two months before this he had never openly announced his marriage to the girl. The more confidence he has, the greater hold this man's police must have upon her. He walks into the streets, and gets home somehow, to again wait—wait for some message, that instinct, rather than reason, tells him Vassilissa must send to him.

At length, leaving an untasted dinner, he orders François on watch again, and bolts for the British Embassy; for a sudden idea has come into his head, that perhaps Beresford, who is one of those peculiar little fellows who seem to pick up everything that is going on, and to know a little something about everybody, may be able to tell him what may lead him to the woman for whom he is so anxious.

Arriving there, to his astonishment the man who answers his summons informs him that Mr. Beresford has been away two days.

"Where?" asks de Verney, giving him a tip.

"I don't know exactly, sir; but it was to one of the islands."

"What makes you think that?"

"I saw him drive across the Troitzkoi bridge."

"Do you think he'll be back to-night?"

"Scarcely! He took a valise with him."

The chance of obtaining any information from Beresford seeming small this evening, Maurice turns his steps again to the Sergievskaia. He is not sorry for his walk: though it has brought nothing, it has kept him from thinking. If he can only do that? That's all he begs God in his mercy to grant this long night that is before him, in which he can do naught to save the woman he loves.

As he reaches the entrance of his house, he gets a sudden sensation. A man passes him rapidly, and, as he does so, whispers in his ear the startling words: "*Take care of yourself; you are watched by the police!*" He turns half way round, so as to get one eye on the man; but the Sergievskaia is too wide a street to be very well lighted, and he cannot recognize him: all he can see is that his informant is rather small.

Maurice gets upstairs to his apartments, and François having nothing to tell him, he is glad of this incident, for it gives him something to speculate upon that will still keep him from thinking of her.

The person who spoke to him was evidently waiting near his door for that purpose, and desperately afraid that he should be seen addressing Maurice; for he passed him very rapidly, and literally threw the words into de Verney's ear as he sped on.

"Who can this friend be?" Maurice ponders.

The voice was familiar; the man spoke in French, and it seems to him that he remembers the tones as being connected with some particular and important episode of his life; but, try as he may, he cannot recollect what one.

After a time, he gives up speculation on who the man is, and devotes his mind as to how any espionage on him may affect his plans or chances.

It had never occurred to him before that his actions might have been watched; he knew spies were everywhere in St. Petersburg, but, being engaged in no conspiracies against the government, had never thought of police espionage. He now becomes rather curious to test the truth of the man's assertion, and to discover if there are any spies immediately about him in this house. Of François, the faithful service of many years makes him as certain as of himself.

There are a great many servants in all Russian establishments, and de Verney has in his employ an Italian waiter for his table and a French cook in his kitchen ; of these gentry he is not so sure.

It is only eleven o'clock, and, as is his usual custom, the Italian is setting a light supper for him in his dining-room. This gentleman he will test to-night.

He looks over his papers, and selects an unimportant letter ; then places it in his pocket-book, strolls in, and sits down at table, forcing himself to appear to eat, though he has been too miserable to care for food since the noon of this day.

During his enforced meal he pulls this letter carefully from his pocket-book, and reads it over several times ; next gets up and paces the apartment, pondering deeply ; then produces and reads the letter again ; and finally tears it into ten pieces and puts them in a cuspidor, and, finishing his meal, walks out into his parlor. Half an hour after this, coming back into the dining-room, he examines the receptacle : the torn-up letter is gone, to a piece ; but cigar stumps and ashes remain to show that the document only has been removed, not the vessel cleaned. He knows he has one spy in his household. The cook he'll look after in the morning.

And now the night is before him. If his thoughts could aid her in any way ! But he has nothing to speculate upon—only her danger ; for he knows Ora Lapuschkin would never have fled from him if she had hope. He tries to read—impossible ! He tries to sleep, and does so ; but then he dreams visions more horrible than his waking thoughts, and he moans : " God help me ! I am so helpless," and paces the floor till the morning sun comes into his windows, to tell him another day is here—but brings him no more hope.

Early in the morning, not to miss a single chance, he sends François to the yacht to order the captain to keep up full steam all day, so as to be ready to move at any moment.

While his body-servant is away on this errand, the Italian brings in his breakfast ; it is a light one—simply a Gatchina trout, a lettuce salad, coffee, and bread and butter. Forcing himself to eat—for he knows if ever a chance of action offers itself he must have strength—de

Verney finishes the trout. At this moment he hears his cook, who has no business to be out in the hall, saying: "What do you want, you white-haired beggar?"

In an instant he is out in the hall too, looking at a white-haired urchin of about twelve years of age, whom the cook is eagerly questioning as to what he wants, has he got a message, etc.

"Go into the kitchen and make me an omelet; you never have enough breakfast. I'll attend to this boy," says de Verney quickly, to prevent reply from the white-headed urchin, who has already opened his mouth.

And the man not going rapidly, he opens the door for him, and cries: "Quick! my omelet;" for he has suddenly become suspicious of cook as well as waiter.

This the man does in a lingering sort of way; and Maurice, who has now a flush on his face, says eagerly: "What can I do for you, my man?"

"First, little father, are you the Frenchman what lives here, the high nobility, called—called—what are you called?" asked the boy, who has forgotten the name, but has found the place.

"De Verney," suggests the chevalier.

"That's it—Nobility! Well, Vassilissa, who is not a liar, told me you'd give me a rouble for this!" and the white-headed boy extends a piece of paper that has grown dirty in his hands.

"Vassilissa is not a liar!" cries de Verney, seizing the missive; "I'll give you two roubles!" In truth, he would give the boy thousands, did not he fear creating suspicion. He hurriedly tears open the note. The joy fades from his face; the contents seem to him so serious. In an ungainly peasant's hand, it reads thus:

"If, as you swore to me on the seven sacraments of our Church, you love my mistress, come to her and save her. Come to-day—to-morrow will be too late.

"Kristofskoi Island,
Between the Bjalosselki Prospekt and the Petrofski Bridge.
"It is called Olga's Datcha and is on the Malaya Neva."

After asking the boy a few questions as to the location of the place, and making very sure he can find it, he says to the little fellow: "Go to Vassilissa and tell her I gave you two roubles, and will do what she asks!"

Then he returns to his breakfast, cursing his stupidity; for the boy has told him that Olga's Datcha is a beautiful villa that had belonged to his mistress, the young Countess Lapuschkin, since he remembers: he had been born there. Maurice had never heard Ora speak of this place; for the girl seldom mentioned her possessions—being so very rich, she had so many of them. Had he, instead of inquiring for the girl, asked about her country houses, he would doubtless have been told of this villa, and would surely have ridden out to see if she was there; it being located on one of the garden islands of the Neva, to which at this season many of the nobility are going for the fresh breezes from the Gulf of Finland. His error has lost him one precious day.

Forcing himself to patience—for a visit at so early an hour in the morning from a gentleman to a lady would have a very curious look in Russia—and compelled any way to wait for François' return, he sits down to finish his breakfast; knowing that food gives strength to brain and body, and guessing he will have need of both this day.

He tells his Italian to get some more coffee, that on the table having grown cold. The man turns from the room, and he takes out Vassilissa's letter to have another careful look at it, to read between its lines if possible. He has hardly got this before him when he hears a stealthy step behind him. In another moment the spy will see this curious document. Hastily picking up the cayenne pepper holder, as the Italian pops his head over his shoulder, Maurice gives two lightning flourishes with his arm, with such a deftness and vigor that, instead of peppering his salad, he cayennes the fellow's eyes, who, blinded, staggers from him and sinks on a sofa, screaming with agony.

"By Jove! I thought you had gone for the coffee, Amadie! I'm afraid I've been a little awkward," remarks de Verney sadly; but, before he can say more, the cook flies in with the omelet, and in another second this number two may see the letter. Having no wish for report of this missive to go to Dimitri, and no time to do aught else, Maurice slaps it under the lettuce in his salad dish, and pins it there with his fork.

But as he does so, did he not control himself he would

give a jump; for the door opens, and in walks Menchikoff himself.

"I called—excuse my early hour, and announcing myself: your door was open—to say to you that I expect to see Prince Platoff to-day, and will give him your note if you have it written," remarks the latter. "But what is the matter with your waiter?"

"Oh," replies de Verney, "Amadie got some pepper in his eyes as I was fixing the salad.—We shall not want you at present; you can go."

And, as the man retires, Maurice cries: "Sit down, Monsieur le Prince, and have some breakfast with me. I can only offer you an omelet and some salad."

"I've already breakfasted," murmurs Dimitri. "Where's your letter? I should be sorry if my relative let you leave St. Petersburg without settling a debt of honor. Sergius is a curious old chap, and after I get married, I'm afraid I may have some financial difficulty with him myself. You're going to leave us to-day?"

"Yes," says de Verney; "but I haven't written the letter. I'll forward it to you."

"Oh, I'll wait till you finish! Don't let me hurry your breakfast." And Dimitri sits down lazily on the sofa, and chats to Maurice; while de Verney, compelled to the feat, coolly eats up his literary salad under the eyes of the prefect of the Third Section.

His curious repast being over, he writes the letter to Prince Platoff, and gives it to Dimitri, who says: "*Au revoir*. I'm really glad you are going, my dear chevalier; this climate of ours is too much for you. You look even worse than last night; you'd die if you stayed here!"

"I shall be very glad to get to Paris," returns Maurice. So they both lie to each other, yet tell the truth.

The moment the prince has gone, de Verney begins his preparations for the day; and, François being now returned, he sends him to a livery stable to get as good a carriage and as fast a pair of Orloff trotters as can be had. Then, in ordinary afternoon dress, and totally unarmed, save by a sound mind and strong body—for the laws against bearing weapons are very stringent—but taking François as his squire with him, to be made useful as occasion may demand, Maurice de Verney, like knight-errant of old, sallies forth to rescue the maiden of his

heart from all tyrants who may enthrall or destroy her.

Crossing the Troitzkoi bridge, de Verney directs the driver, who is about to turn to the left for the more direct way, to take the Kamennoi Island street. In half an hour they have crossed the Malaya Neva, and are on that beautiful island, driving between pretty villas backed by pine-trees and surrounded by the rapid-growing foliage of the north, that is already green and fresh this June day. Turning to their left, they soon pass another bridge, to Kristofshoi Island, perhaps the least thickly settled of all these beauty spots of St. Petersburg, skirting the banks of the blue Malaya Neva, whose waters are rushing out between green banks to the Finnish Gulf.

After a few minutes the driver says, "Olga's Datcha!" and de Verney sees the place upon which he guesses will be played the game on which the happiness of all his future will depend. He heaves a sigh—he has so few trump cards—then looks at his watch. It is one o'clock, the hour at which he wished to arrive.

He examines the scene; it is ravishingly beautiful. Art has done much for it, but nature more. "Olga's Datcha"—*Anglicè* "Olga's gift," prettily named after the girl's patron saint by her father, who had built this place just before the time a little daughter came to his heart from a dead mother's breast—is termed by the Russians a villa, but is large enough, though only two stories high, to be considered a country house in other lands. It is Eastern in its architecture. Through the trees Maurice can see a couple of cupolas and minarets gleam, also a miniature lake, from which a bubbling, rushing brook runs into the river, whose blue waters are sparkling in the sunlight. About the house are beautiful gardens, and connected with it a conservatory and hothouse full of growing grapes, oranges, palms, and orchids; while encircling all this is the eternal green of the northern forests of pine, and larch, and fir. A little avenue, some two hundred yards long, winds up to the house. This is heavily shaded by trees of lime and locust. The place seems half asleep in the sunlight as de Verney drives up the avenue.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SIX NAPKINS.

A COUPLE of Russian flunkies in the countess' liveries are lounging in the hall, the door of which is open, the day being warm. Telling François to take the carriage round to the stables, Maurice jumps out, and gives his card and a rouble to one of the menials, both of whom have stepped to the *porte-cochère* to meet him.

"Take my name to your mistress, and the rouble for yourself," he remarks.

"The countess has company," returns the man. "Will monsieur wait a moment?"

"No, I'll follow you. I'm one of the company," says de Verney shortly, and giving the man no time to hesitate, follows him at once into a great summer sitting-room, the windows of which open directly on the garden, that slopes slightly down to the river.

As his name is announced, he hears little exclamations from one or two in the room. One of them, he is sure, is in Ora's voice. He enters; she has advanced a step to meet him; on her face there is a sudden flush. He takes her hand; it is trembling and throbbing in his grasp. She murmurs a word of greeting.

"Ah, de Verney, my boy!" says Platoff, coming to him in that free-and-easy way old gentlemen sometimes assume to younger ones. "How did you find us out so soon? We are just getting my ward's house in order, and then we'll have all St. Petersburg here."

"I got your address from Dimitri Menchikoff," replies Maurice, giving lie for lie with diplomatic ease.

At this Sergius gives a little gesture of surprise, and sinks into a chair, astonished and disgusted, for he is not at all pleased to see Maurice de Verney this afternoon.

Herr Zamaroff also, Maurice notes, is in the room. Having greeted the financier, the chevalier turns to get one of the many shocks this day has in store for him; for as Ora remarks, "Monsieur de Verney, let me present you to my aunt, the Princess Platoff," he finds himself gazing on the face of Louise, the flower-girl of the Jardin d'Acclimatation of ten years ago.

"Mademoiselle de Brian, the lady you sent to us in Paris to be my governess in 1868—ah, I see you remember her!" says the young countess a little pointedly; for she still recollects, though she has forgiven, the story Sergius has told her at the ball on the Frontanka.

He looks again, to be sure of his senses—the surprise is so great. With the look, conviction comes to him: the eyes are as dark and lurid, the hair as tawny, as they were when he had last spoken to Louise at the house of Lieber, in the Rue de Vignes.

The lady murmurs: "I can understand your surprise, Monsieur de Verney. You did not guess the governess had changed into a princess," and turns to a gentleman who is seated near her.

This is young Beresford, who cries out to him: "I found them first, de Verney. I'm great at scenting out the beauties of nature. This is my second day."

To this Maurice makes some laughing rejoinder, and sits down to pull himself together. He knows he has now another enemy in the house, and is very much surprised at it. He had never doubted that Louise had been sent away on the receipt of his letter by the general. But, at the worst, she has done her duty by the orphan: no one looking at Ora could doubt that she was anything but good and noble.

He gazes quietly at the girl: the blush has faded from her face; she has sunk into a chair and is thinking. But the change in her appearance in the last two days gives him a shudder. Anxiety has made fearful attacks upon Ora Lapuschkin. Not that she is less beautiful—for she is more so—only her beauty has become more ethereal, more spiritual, and less of this earth—she seems to be floating away from him.

The company are seated about the room, Zamaroff and Platoff together, the princess and Beresford in a little alcove by themselves, while Ora has been doing her duty as hostess, assisted by Vassilissa, who is now presiding at the samovar. As he looks round, the maid is passing the tea about in delicate china cups. With its caravan flavor slightly heightened by slices of lemon, after the fashion of the country, it is a refreshing afternoon drink. To it have been added some cakes and bonbons and fruit, together with some Russian delicacies with unpronounce-

able names. These refreshments easily take the place of a lunch between the late breakfast and later dinner usual in fashionable Muscovite houses.

Had de Verney the ease of mind to note the furniture and decorations of the room, he would see that they were even more gracefully magnificent than at Ora's palace on the Frontanka. Anxious as he now feels, he notices that the china is Sèvres, the plate and samovar massive silver, and the table-linen of the most delicate damask.

Vassilissa approaches him, bearing a cup of tea and some sweets on a little salver. Placing these upon a small table near him, the girl gives him a grateful glance.

The room being very large, they are somewhat apart from all the others. De Verney says aloud: "Two lumps of sugar, please," and, while she is giving them to him, whispers: "Has anything new happened?"

The girl shakes her head, and is moving from him. He calls her back by "Excuse me, another lump!" and mutters: "As soon as possible, I must speak to you."

Her eyes answer "Yes," as she turns to minister to the wants of the Princess Platoff, who is apparently engaged in a flirtation with young Beresford, who sits *tête-à-tête* with her, gazing at her dark eyes, despite an occasional malignant scowl old Sergius throws at them, though Herr Zamaroff is still talking to him in an undertone.

A moment after this, however, Platoff gets up and saunters over, cup in hand, to de Verney, and enters into a casual conversation with him, to which Maurice answers perhaps rather wildly; for, having recovered from the astonishment of his encounter with Louise, he is now devoting his mind to one problem: How to get an insight into what is going on under the outward placid, social surface of this house. Every faculty of his being is devoted to obtaining some clew to this matter—at present so curiously intangible, so mysteriously vague. De Verney drinks his tea, while his eyes and ears note everything that takes place in the room.

After a moment or two, Platoff gives a sniff of laughter: he has chanced to glance at Herr Zamaroff. Maurice follows his gaze, and sees that the financier, whose manners are uncompromisingly plebeian, is surreptitiously wiping his hands on the table-cloth.

Sergius walks to his niece, and, as he whispers a word

or two to her, de Verney notes that the only part of the girl which he can see becomes curiously affected. It is her lovely foot, which, protruding from her morning robe in light silk stocking and bronze slipper, has been patting nervously a footstool upon which it has carelessly rested. He has watched this, not because it was beautiful, but because since his entrance Ora has carefully avoided his glance, and has persistently turned her head away from his eyes ; therefore, as he has wished to note how anything taking place affects her, he has been compelled to rely upon the actions of her little foot.

As the prince whispers to her, the foot stops its beating and presses itself into the cushion of the footstool, as if sudden determination had come to it. The girl says : " Vassilissa, pass a napkin to Herr Zamaroff."

Maurice immediately asks this question of himself : " Why the deuce does giving a napkin to that ill-mannered old banker affect the young countess ? " On his first seeing Zamaroff, he had thought it curious to find him received in this exclusive house, as a friend, by Platoff, who was an aristocrat in all his ideas, and who considered his family one of the most noble in Russia.

Before he has time to speculate more on this, Ora rises and says : " Vassilissa, you are forgetful this afternoon. Monsieur de Verney and the rest."

On this the peasant girl brings to Maurice a beautiful napkin of silken damask, more like an exquisite handkerchief than anything else, with its delicate yellow-white center, and hem decorated with painted violets and blush rosebuds, save in one corner, which bears the crest and motto of the Lapuschkins.

" Just the thing ! " cries Princess Platoff. " Monsieur Beresford, help me tie my bonbons up in this ! "

As this goes on, Ora Lapuschkin, as if having made up her mind to some definite line of action, and feeling strong enough to pursue it, comes over to the great fireplace, in which a bright fire of pine-logs is burning ; for, though warm in the sunshine, the day, in the shade and sea breeze fresh from the Finnish Gulf, is still chilly.

Leaning against this, near which de Verney sits, she turns upon him her beautiful eyes, smiles a little piteous smile, and says : " I thought you were to leave St. Peters-

burg yesterday. I wrote you my fare—farewell. Did you not get it?"

"Oh, yes. I am going to-day," murmurs Maurice. Next he pointedly whispers: "My yacht is ready! I've a carriage at the door; Vassilissa and you, quick!"

At this she astonishes him, for she cries out, laughing: "What do you all think! Monsieur de Verney wishes us to go on a yacht cruise with him to-day, upon the rough waters of the gulf. It is too cruel a proposition to a girl who gets sea-sick at the mouth of Neva, and who, if the vessel pitched a little, would die of fright."

Here Maurice catches some curious looks between Zamaroff and Sergius, though he is too miserable for a moment to think what they may mean; for he sees this girl has for some reason desperately determined to cut herself off from any chance of his aid.

Still he recovers his senses in time to note, in rather a vague manner, that the Hebrew financier now strolls onto the terrace, wiping his mustache with his napkin, and, after getting outside, forgetfully places it in his pocket, and wanders off, doubtless to enjoy the beautiful garden.

During this, Sergius is saying to him: "Pooh, my dear de Verney, little Ora has never been at sea."

"Yes," cries Beresford, "she's like the captain of the *Pinafore*, 'never, never sick at sea'! Ever heard that opera? It's all the rage now in London, princess! Awfully jolly, don't yer know—by Sullivan, don't yer see!" And he hums the captain's ditty to Louise, who says she'll play an accompaniment for him during the afternoon.

"Won't you do it now?" asks the boy, with eager eyes.

She laughs into them: "After we've eaten the bonbons!" And the two saunter into the grounds together, Cuthbert carrying the sweets. A moment after, her voice comes in through the open window in a little playful scream: "Oh, you haven't tied this napkin tight! Our *marrons glacés* are dropping into the rose-bushes."

At these words Platoff, who has been looking, scowling off and on, at his wife and the young Englishman, mutters something about the garden, and strides out after them; pocketing, as he goes, his napkin in an abstracted way.

For a moment Ora, Vassilissa, and de Verney are together.

"Your guardian is rather jealous—so jealous that he mistakes his napkin for his pocket-handkerchief!" remarks Maurice with a sneering laugh; for the girl has made him so unhappy that he is not, perhaps, sorry to see a man, whom he thinks perhaps the cause of it, miserable also. "You've also had a charming governess, Mademoiselle la Comtesse!"

Ora pays little attention to this, though, at the mention of Platoff's absent-mindedness in regard to his napkin, her face has lost a little of its pallor, for she is now unnaturally pale. She turns to Vassilissa, and gives her some errand to do, and her foster-sister leaves the room reluctantly.

Then she sounds a bell, walks straight up to de Verney and astounds him; for she says, in a low, sad voice: "Maurice, a last favor—leave this house at once!"

"Never! the yacht awaits both you and me! My God, you don't doubt me! Dear one, you don't doubt me!" he mutters to her. "Tell me how to save you!"

"Save yourself—that is all," the girl cries to him. "Save yourself!"

"And you also," he says in a hoarse voice.

Here she horrifies him by gasping: "Too late! Do you suppose I would have fled from you—if it had—not been—too late? Do you suppose now they would ever let me go—alive?"

She pauses here, and by a mighty effort controls herself, for the footman has entered. "Order Monsieur de Verney's carriage to the door!" she commands; and, when the man has gone, comes to Maurice and cries: "Good-bye! I know you'd sacrifice yourself for me; but I'm not selfish enough for that. Good-bye!" and flies from him to a little side door, for he has turned toward her to hold her to him, and beg her, by her love for him, to confide in him, and give him a chance of saving her. Fearing this, she opens the little side door of the apartment, and whispers to him words that would stupefy him if he would but let them: "Read about me in the papers to-morrow; but, as you love your life, go!"

Then Ora Lapuschkin gets her wish. He says coolly: "Very well; with your permission, my dear countess,

I'll smoke here till my carriage, you so kindly ordered for me, comes to the door." And quietly producing a cigar, lights it and sits down.

She mutters: "He does not love me! My God! But it is better thus!" and flies from him with despair and agony on her beautiful face. She has her wish, and it has broken her heart—she is a woman.

A few moments after, the footman comes in and announces his carriage.

"Tell it to wait," he says, and tosses the man a rouble.

He mutters: "I'll save her in spite of herself—in spite of the *unknown!* What is the unknown? Without I know that I'm—God help me—useless, aimless! Since she won't tell me, I can find it out better if she thinks I've gone. I'll—I'll smoke!" and does so in those short, quick puffs that show how nervously, actively, and unsuccessfully his mind is working; while all the time upon the brow of this contemplative, quiet, smoking man is a sweat of agony.

Upon this reverie Mr. Beresford breaks. He has just come in from the garden, muttering to himself: "Look here, de Verney, old fellah, that prince is driving me mad with his jealousy, don't yer know?"

Maurice looks up with a start; he wants some information, and here is the man to give it.

"Yes, and you are driving him mad also," replies the Frenchman, and gives the young man some good advice. "You'd better leave this house, Cuthbert," he says. "Platoff has the jealousy of an old man!"

"Pshaw, I can hold my own against him. I have the love of a young man. Of course, this is between ourselves, don't yer see!" Here he looks smilingly at Maurice, and utters proudly: "An *amour* with a princess is the making of a diplomate, don't yer know!"

"More generally the *breaking* of one," returns de Verney. "But can you tell me what the princess did with her napkin you carried away with you?"

"Oh, by Jove! that was funny. After we got into the garden, I was perhaps a little ambitious—just for a kiss of the hand, yer know—nothing more; she's so awfully fetching, don't yer see! And I was struggling for her little white hand, you understand—Parisian fashion—

very desperate and broken-hearted, don't yer see ! Well, and she tossed me all the candies and said: 'My poor boy, if we had met before,—but those are sweeter than my hand would be to you,' and——"

"And the napkin," interjects de Verney impatiently.

"Oh, of course ! That's the point of it, old fellah. Marguerite was so agitated she wiped the tears from her eyes with that napkin, and in her emotion put it in her pocket."

"Marguerite ?"

"Yes ; that's the princess's name. She was Mademoiselle Marguerite de Brian before old Platoff got on his knees to her."

"Oh !"

A moment after Maurice suggests: "These napkins are rather peculiar in their design ?"

"Yes ; never saw any so pretty before !"

"No ! You were here yesterday ?"

"Yes; but they had plain ones then. These came from town this morning."

"Ah, now I see," interjects de Verney. "That is the reason they are taken as souvenirs."

"Souvenirs ? Oh—ah, yes ! Now I understand."

"What ?"

"Why, Marguerite laughingly said, if I was a very good boy to-day, she'd give me hers to remember her by—*gage d'amour*—don't yer see ?"

"She didn't give it you at once, only promised it to you ?"

"Of course—reward of merit. They're awful handsome, aren't they ?" remarks Beresford, picking one up from a table near him. "Must have cost a pot of money ! I heard the steward giving the flunkies the deuce about 'em this morning."

"Ah !"

"Y-es ! I couldn't see myself why he was in such a rage ; but, all the same, he was. They hadn't got here, don't yer know !"

"Who is the steward ?"

"How should I know his name ? He is some Dutchman or other.—By the bye, if you don't mind, I'll just step out to the conservatory ; I think I see a parasol going there—you know who, old fellah." And with that,

Cuthbert, who has been looking out of the window the whole interview, strides hurriedly from the room, leaving de Verney with a puzzled expression on his face.

He picks up his napkin that is on a table near him, and looks at it carefully. Beyond its beauty there is nothing remarkable in the white silken web, with its pretty border of flowers and the Lapuschkin crest. "Curious," he thinks to himself as he smokes: "in one way or another, Zamaroff, Platoff, and his wife each took one of these from the room; and people in Russia are no more apt to carry off the napkins than in other places."

Just here another surprise comes to him.

At one of the open windows of the room appears a man whom he has sometimes seen in attendance upon Prince Dimitri Menchikoff as his body-servant.

This fellow has a typical Russian face, very honest, simple, and determined, but very sad. He comes in and looks about the room, and seeing de Verney, whom he probably knows by sight, mumbles as if frightened: "Your pardon, your high nobility; but I come to remove the tea-things."

"All right," returns Maurice. "Help yourself!" But it strikes him as curious, that Menchikoff's servant should be doing the work of Ora's domestics, of whom there are evidently plenty about the house and grounds; consequently, as he smokes, he turns one eye on the man, and catches him, after moving about the various plates, tea-things, and eatables with considerable clatter and in a nervous way, slinking out of the room with one of the napkins under his jacket.

With this, his interest in the napkins jumps tenfold. He hurriedly examines his again; but, go over it as he may, it is still a disappointment. "If I had a microscope!" he mutters. But at this moment Vassilissa comes in and astonishes him. She takes another of the napkins and goes out.

He calls to her to come back—he would speak to her; but she does not answer him, and, on his getting up to approach her, gives him a disdainful glance and disappears.

"Egad!" he thinks with a puzzled expression. "Vassilissa pockets her dividend in napkins also."

He looks about, and finds that his is the only one left in the room; and, seeing some one approaching from the garden, he quickly slips it in his pocket and sits down to see what will happen.

A moment after, a man of German appearance comes in, and looks about with an air of authority. Then, seeing de Verney, he remarks: "Your pardon, sir, but these careless servants need looking after;" all the time his eyes wandering furtively about the room, as if seeking something they cannot find. Then he goes on again: "You have not seen a napkin in the room, sir?"

"No," mutters Maurice in a half-sleepy tone, lazily puffing his weed.

"Strange!" remarks the man. "These napkins were very expensive. Five have been returned to the housekeeper; one is lacking to complete the six;" and, after another and more careful search, wanders uneasily from the room.

"How he lied to me! Five have been returned; one is lacking to complete the six," cogitates de Verney. Here he gives a sudden start: he knows that most nihilist circles have generally that number of members, now that they have been divided for safety into small groups; each person being a member of only two of them, and thus furnishing the means of communication between them, yet under no circumstance being able to betray more than his immediate associates—twelve in all, though there may be thousands of brethren about him.

"Six!" he mutters, and takes out his napkin for further examination; but this is no more successful than the others he has made. He drops the white silken damask on his lap, and thinks with all his soul. This man's face is curiously familiar to him; but, rack his brain how he may, he can't remember just where he has seen it. From his appearance and manner, he is doubtless the German steward of Ora, the one of whom Cuthbert spoke as giving the flunkies the devil for the non-arrival of the napkins. What have these cursed bits of damask to do with his love's fate and his own? Oh, for a clew to this riddle! a grip—just a little grip on this mystery!

The harder he thinks, the harder he smokes. And now to him comes one of those little accidents by which our lives are often changed for better or for worse; by

some careless, nervous movement, he drops the hot ashes of the cigar on this white woven thing on his lap that puzzles him. With equal impatience he tosses the ashes on the floor, but, as he does so, gives a little gasp of joy —*the heat from the ashes has developed a single character on the napkin;* a *letter*—just one little letter—but the secret is his. On each of these napkins is a message, written in sympathetic ink, VISIBLE ONLY ON THE APPLICATION OF HEAT.

"The grip of the secret!" he mutters, and in a second is kneeling before the blazing pine-logs, holding up to them the white napkin, on which soon appear, in a peculiarly Russian, but he thinks disguised, hand, these sentences, that make him—strong man as he is—grow pale, not with fear, but with excitement; for this is what he sees:

"He comes to-day!

"The one chosen by lot for his executioner shall be told who he is, and then shall execute our sentence—or shall suffer the fate of those who disobey!

"A second circle has been notified, that they may assist in this righteous taking off of one who deserves death.

"By order of

"THE RUSSIAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE."

As he reads this he hears a slight noise behind him, and feels on the back of his neck the breath of something. Glancing up, the mirror on the mantel over his head reflects an arm holding a long knife that is flashing to his heart.

The lightning quickness that made him a victor in the arena comes to him again. He reaches up, seizes the wrist, and stops it, the knife within an inch of his breast; then, with an old but not forgotten trick, gives this wrist such a wrenching twist that the knife drops from the grasp of the man who had struck at him, and he hears behind him a choked-down groan of anguish.

"The fracture of the small bone of the wrist is generally painful. I know exactly the effect of that grip, my murderous friend!" he says lightly; and turning round now recognizes with a start in the creature before him, whose eyes gaze at his with wild and desperate intensity, the chemist of the Rue de Maubeuge—the one he has last seen in Mazas prison.

Then he goes on quickly: "Before inflammation sets in, I want your signature. But first——" Here he picks up the long carving-knife which this man had taken from the tea-table to kill him, and upon which Hermann's eyes are once more gazing as if he would like to use it again. "Now let me examine !"

As de Verney approaches him, the German, with a snarl, is about to put his left, uninjured hand behind him ; but Maurice, seizing this, mutters : "Try that, and I'll break your other wrist !" Then, despite his struggles, the chevalier searches him, and pulling out a revolver from his pocket, laughs harshly and says: "Ah ha! concealed weapons. By General Gourko's last proclamation—Siberia !"

Next, in a very stern voice—for at this the man has grown restive again—he cries: "In front of that table, sir !—so !" and leading Hermann to a writing-stand, on which are paper, ink, and pens, he stations the man on one side of it. Seating himself opposite this conspirator, Maurice mutters: "Move hands, feet, or tongue while I write, and I'll blow your brains out !—I shoot equally well with either hand." Then, with one eye and Hermann's own revolver pointed at the German, Maurice de Verney, devoting his other eye to his work, hurriedly writes ; once or twice considering for a moment, then his pen going on to the finish.

"Now," he says, "sign that !" in a voice that makes the other start, and gaze at him.

"What is it? Do you suppose I'm going to sign without knowing what it is ?" mutters Hermann.

"All right ! I'll read it," returns de Verney; which he does, while the German's eyes open in astonishment; for it is as follows :

"I, Hermann Margo—alias Schultz—alias, etc., educated chemist at Heidelberg, afterward in Berlin, afterward in Paris in '68, where I, in conjunction with my sister, Louise Tourney, the wife of Auguste Lieber, and now the Princess Sergius Platoff, attempted the life of the Prince Imperial of France——"

"*Herr Gott in Himmel!* How did you know that ?" gasps the German; then gives a great cry—"Ah! I know you ! You who betrayed us in Paris—*Mouchard!* You are a Russian police spy now !" and would fly at

Maurice's throat were it not for the pistol that stands in the way.

„ I am not connected with the Russian Government," returns the Frenchman. "I'm trying to save the innocent, now, as I did then. But listen—for your own life, *listen!*" and he reads on:

"—declare that as steward of the Countess Ora Lapuschkin, I have caused to meet under her roof a nihilist circle, of which I am member, for the purposes of murder—without either her knowledge or consent.

"June 3d, 1879."

Then he says: "Sign that!"

"And why?" asks Hermann, with a grin of malicious rage even in his pain, for he notes that Maurice's voice has become low and tender as he has uttered the name of Ora Lapuschkin. "Why should I sign that, Monsieur Police Spy?"

"Because," returns de Verney, "if you do I give you my passport to leave Russia!" And he shows him the document, remarking: "With your chemical knowledge you can alter this to suit your description. This means for you ESCAPE AND LIFE!"

"And if not?" queries the steward.

"You leave this room in the custody of the police; and you can guess the rest," replies Maurice, with a French shrug of the shoulders.

"I'll—I'll sign!" mutters Hermann suddenly; and he does so, as de Verney touches the bell and asks one of the servants to send to him François, who is waiting in his carriage at the door.

Looking over the document, and examining the signature, he gives a sigh of relief, and remarks: "This may prevent trouble to your mistress coming from your crime."

"Perhaps!" says Hermann, with a grim smile, that does not make Maurice more easy respecting the woman he loves.

"You know that this is an order from the Russian National Committee—the highest group of nihilists—to another circle?"

"Undoubtedly! I'm not fool enough to deny that."

"For the commission of a murder!" he says, looking at the napkin he has in his hand.

"Pardon me," replies Hermann; "the order for an execution!"

"Well, execution if you like; but to have this in your possession means death if discovered."

"Of course."

"Now, you're too old a conspirator to carry with you, after use, this ticket to Siberia or the scaffold?"

"Certainly not! I should have destroyed it!" murmurs the German.

"Burnt it!" cries Maurice.

"No, I am a chemist. I should have dissolved the sympathetic ink, and made the napkin innocent!" replies Hermann, who is almost as proud of his science as of his conspiracy.

"A—ah!" cries Maurice suddenly. Then he looks at him in doubt, and mutters: "You have no acids?"

"Certainly not! I don't need them. The Comtesse Ora uses chloroform for her nervous headaches—she has them often lately," the man says significantly.

"Then chloroform will wash this out?" asks Maurice eagerly.

"Soak that napkin in chloroform, leave it in the sun for ten minutes, and not a trace of that writing will remain," remarks Hermann.

"Of course you should know—you wrote them," rejoins Maurice.

"Not at all!" cries Hermann. "Don't you suppose I'm chemist enough to know of what that ink is made, by seeing the color of the writing? I tell you chloroform will destroy that ink; chlorine is the great bleaching agent of the world—on my honor!"

"On the honor of a *conspirator!*" sneers de Verney, who is very anxious to be certain on this point.

"On the honor of a CHEMIST!" cries the scientist; and Maurice knows he has told him the truth. As a political agitator he might lie, but as an exponent of chemical fact —never!

At this moment François comes into the room, and, saluting in his bluff, military style, remarks: "At your orders!"

De Verney thinks a minute, and then speaks rapidly:

"François," he says, "you will put this gentleman in my carriage, and escort him to my—my old office at the French Embassy; it is unoccupied now. That building would be safer than my apartments; my waiter and cook are spies. There you will lock him in; and if he tries to speak to a living being on the road you will blow out his brains with his own pistol!" Here he passes to his servant the revolver of which he has despoiled the chemist; and goes on, a little tremble in his voice, but determinedly, as if he had made up his mind to a certain desperate course, and would not be stopped in it: "If I do not return by to-morrow morning, give this gentleman this—my passport to leave Russia!"

Here François, for the first time in his life, shakes his head at his master. He mutters: "That is your safety here—I'll not take it!" and refuses to put his hand on it.

"You must! He's got my word, and I'll keep it. Don't you dare to dispute me in my need!" cries de Verney, in a hoarse voice. "You were a soldier. Obey orders!" And this time, the old habit of discipline coming to the veteran, he takes the paper from his master, but mutters: "You risk yourself for *him!*" gazing with savage eyes at Hermann, who has a sneering smile on his face.

Then Maurice goes hurriedly on, for he is anxious to get the business through; he has many things to accomplish now; he is at last at work. "François, attend to this. This is the most careful of all. After you have given this man twenty-four hours to fly the country, give this document," here he hands Hermann's confession to his servant, "to the French minister, and ask his Excellency to forward it to General Gourko, the Governor of St. Petersburg. You understand?"

"I do, sir," mutters François tenderly to his master, and "This way, sir!" savagely to Hermann.

Here de Verney, who is considerate in everything, says suddenly to the German: "Have you money enough for your traveling expenses?"

"Plenty," mutters Hermann; "I shall go to the United States."

"Ah, yes! That government would probably suit even you."

"No, it wouldn't! I shall again conspire."

"What! in that republic?"

"They have rich men there," mutters the fanatic, grinding his teeth. "All governments are bad; I tear them down."

"My poor creature, take my advice—let Uncle Sam alone. He's a long-suffering old boy; he's very hard to start, but he's worse to stop. He'll send you to a hotter place than Siberia." Then in a changed tone Maurice says: "François, this apostle of destruction will need a surgeon when he gets in town; send for the one employed by the embassy—he's discreet."

"In front of me, sir!" utters François sternly. But as Hermann is going out, de Verney suddenly draws him to one side and whispers: "You don't know who wrote on the napkins?"

"No."

"Do you know who is to be killed?"

"Yes."

"His name?"

"Dimitri Menchikoff, Prefect of the Secret Police!"

"My God! Is any one yet appointed to do it?"

"Yes; the lots were drawn last night."

"Who is it?"

"Find that out yourself, police spy! That's your business. I've kept my part of the bargain: you keep yours, and let me go!" mutters Hermann. "You'll be delighted at the discovery. Ha, ha, ha! You'll be happy when you know." And, mocking de Verney, this apostle of freedom is marched away in front of François, who puts him into Maurice's carriage and drives him into St. Petersburg.

As for de Verney, he is more light-hearted than he has been since he has found his love would not or could not fly with him; for he is at work, and he has that wonderful power that wins more prizes in this life than either luck or genius—that power of developing greater force the more the opposition; of fighting the harder and staying the longer, the more what opposes him fights and stays; of rising to the situation and conquering it.

He ponders as to who has drawn the lot to kill Dimitri Menchikoff—Zamaroff, Platoff, Louise, Dimitri's servant, and Vassilissa carried off the nihilist messages. It must be one of the five. He himself, he remembers with

a shiver, has the other "ticket to Siberia" in his pocket, and it is cold and uncomfortable; for he burnt his ships behind him when he gave up his passport to Hermann, and sent François away. But it was worth it! Hermann's confession in the hands of an honest soldier—as he believes Gourko is—will surely save her from the consequences of so small a crime as not denouncing her uncle and guardian, though these meetings have taken place under Ora's roof.

What to do next?—Warn Dimitri Menchikoff, of course; bargain with him for Ora's safety, for the little crime of not denouncing old Platoff; and save the head of secret police. But here another curious question comes and startles him. Why is Platoff, the aristocrat, who loves nothing but himself, a nihilist, and Zamaroff, who loves nothing but his money, another?—Why?

While he is pondering on this, Vassilissa comes to him and drives speculation out of his head with a sledge-hammer shock.

She says, glaring at him with contemptuous eyes: "You miserable coward! Why are you here, after deserting the being you swore you loved, and breaking her noble heart?"

"I have not deserted her!"

"No? When she came into her boudoir, and wrung her hands, and moaned: 'It's easier now he does not love me. Alone! Betrayed! Sacrificed!' That's what she said!" cries the peasant girl.

Here de Verney astonishes Vassilissa; he hisses at her: "I have not deserted your mistress; but you have betrayed her, you viper!"

"I!" gasps the girl.

"Yes; you and your nihilist gang, who would commit a murder under her roof, and so compromise, under the military law, her safety. Do you want your foster-sister, for your crime, tried by court-martial?"

"I! for the love of God, no!" gasps the girl.

"Then why are you a nihilist?"

"I'm not a nihilist!"

"Pish! Why do you deny it?" cries de Verney in a rage, for the girl's stubborn manner angers him. "Did you not carry one of these from this room?" and he shows her the damask that contains the fatal order.

"Yes; I did that. What does that matter, anyway?" says Vassilissa quietly. "I didn't steal it. I took it for my mistress."

"Ora!" gasps Maurice. "My God!"

"Yes! She had a headache; she said it would be just the thing to moisten with chloroform and bind about her head," returns the girl.

"Ah! You are sure—she had—a headache," stutters de Verney; for he is now trembling a little, an awful fear having come to him.

"Certainly!" says Vassilissa. "She had a cold, also. She ordered a fire lighted in her boudoir."

"Like that one?" he gasps, pointing to the flame that had given him heat by which to read the napkin.

"Yes! Why are you looking at me so?" screams the girl.

"Because," says the chevalier, gazing at her, and only seeing truth and fidelity in her eyes, "because the woman we—we both love is one of a nihilist circle, who to-day will murder the head of police. Think you we can save her? THINK YOU SHE'LL LIVE LONG?" and he utters a ghastly laugh.

And here Vassilissa gives him another blow, for it confirms his fears: "Ah! that's why Ora prayed all last night before her patron saint,—for some one about to die; but it was herself.—My God! I know it was *herself!* Do you think Ora a murderess?" cries the girl, under her breath, glaring at him with wild eyes.

"No!" cries de Verney back to her. "The woman I love—NEVER!" Here he mutters an awful oath to himself, and shoots out between his clinched teeth: "AND IF SHE WERE, I'D SAVE HER ANYWAY!"

And Vassilissa, falling at his feet, begins to kiss his hands.

CHAPTER XX.

THAT FRENCHMAN!

THIS does not last long. He whispers to the peasant: "Tears when hope is gone;—now action! Tell me all that has happened in your mistress's boudoir since you first left this room!" Looking at his watch, he is sur-

prised to find it nearly three o'clock, and mutters: "Over an hour ago!".

"When I got there I found Prince Platoff and Herr Zamaroff in Ora's boudoir—they had left some papers on her table—and Zamaroff was saying the ornaments in the room were worth thirty thousand roubles."

"Ah!" This is from Maurice; for now Dimitri's remark at the club comes back to him, and he begins to think money, not politics, may be the incentive of the bankrupt guardian and his creditor.

A moment after, Vassilissa adds to this suspicion. She whispers: "I've seen them together valuing this property, and Zamaroff was in Tula at her great country estate, doing the same thing, a few months ago; I saw him there."

"Well, what next did they do?" asks Maurice eagerly.

"Then—they must have been there some little time, for they had been writing at the table; I was in Ora's bedroom, and heard them through the curtained entrance. Zamaroff said, 'Her instructions are all right. We've a pleasant surprise for Dimitri and the heiress.'"

"Her instructions?—Ora's instructions?" mutters Maurice, a new and greater fear coming to him with these words. "What next?"

"Then the old prince seemed very sad, and said: 'If I could afford it, I'd spare her.' But Zamaroff, who had been looking through the window, interrupted him by an awful cry: 'That idiot Hermann has notified the second circle! Great heavens! We may not be able to control this affair. If it has got from out our hands, it's tragedy for us also!' And the two together ran out, cursing the steward; and then she came in and ordered a fire lighted, and sent me for the napkin."

"Is that all?"

"Yes; she has made her afternoon toilet—all in white like a bride——"

"Never mind the dresses! What next?" interjects Maurice. "Is that everything?"

"Yes!"

"Now take me to her—quietly and unobserved," says de Verney.

But Vassilissa mutters: "I cannot: she is at her devotions; she is praying to her saint!"

"Take me to her, if you would have me save her life —quick!" he says sternly.

So adjured, this peasant girl, who has learned to obey all who claim to be her masters, opens the little side door, and leads him up a flight of stairs, then through an anteroom, and, after looking herself through the hanging draperies of silk, whispers: "There! Would you dare to disturb her?"

Gazing in himself, Maurice is struck by wonder, the picture before him is so beautiful; by reverence, the sight he beholds is so quietly sad, so pathetically devout—for the girl of his heart is praying for one about to die.

The foreground of this picture is Eastern in its architecture and colors; little Moorish arches separate Ora's boudoir from the rest of her apartments, silken hangings drape the entrances and windows; but lightness is given to this scene by fairy-like French furniture, bric-à-brac, statuary, and paintings. A wood fire is burning brightly on the open hearth; the sun, just beginning to decline in the heavens, shines mellowly in through the windows and a large doorway leading to a balcony latticed in Oriental style; behind which are the green pine-trees of the grounds, and beyond them the blue waters of the Neva, joining a mile away the waves of the Finnish Gulf. The songs of birds in the trees mingle with the murmur of a little brook, and come in the open windows. All is peace and happiness.

The background is mediæval—religious—heart-breaking! In a little alcove filled with climbing ivy, the girl of his heart has made a sanctuary for her patron saint, as is the custom of her religion. Before the image of Saint Olga, prostrate and sad in the white of innocence, the girl he loves is praying. No tears are in her beautiful eyes, nothing but faith—the faith in heaven of one who has no faith or hope on earth.

Then to this man comes a mighty pity, for he can see awful suffering as well as resignation.

A moment after she rises from her knees; her sunny hair, that is unconfined, floating all about her, and becoming in the sunlight clouds of gold. She wrings her hands a little, perhaps unconsciously, and mutters: "But what use? He has deserted me! Who can save me?"

Then he steps behind her and whispers.: "The man

who loves you!" and would encircle her with a supporting arm.

But she gives a great cry, and turning round horrifies him; for he is looking at the face of one who has put the trials and sorrows of life behind her, and is like a beautiful spirit. To him she now appears almost an angel.

Then over her pale face a rushing blush of love sweeps. On seeing him, the angel is becoming mortal. She cries: "You'll save me—from what? ha, ha, ha! from what?" and sinks down by a chair, laughing and crying almost together; for the girl's nerves, at this sudden joy or fear, or both, have given way.

"From a fit of hysterics, which is rather becoming—in a white dress!" says de Verney with a laugh; for he is determined to taunt her to a confession, in order to know how to act with judgment.

"Ah, you do not know! My heaven! you would not jest if you but knew!" And the girl springs to her feet, and would run about the apartment, wringing her hands; but his words strike her like an electric shock, and make her for a moment a statue.

"That you are a *nihilist!*" he says sternly.

After a second the statue turns her face to his, and through bloodless lips murmurs: "Ah, you do know—*that last night I drew* THE FATAL LOT—while Zamaroff held them in his hands—that assigns me—to commit—a murder!"

At these awful words he winces and shudders, though he has half expected them; and forcing himself to calmness, nay, almost lightness, for he will force this girl from a mood in which she would sacrifice herself like an Eastern fatalist, says: "Certainly I know that, FOR I AM A NIHILIST MYSELF!"

At this she cries out: "No, no! Impossible!" in a tone of horror.

"Pooh!" laughs de Verney. "If right for you to be one, it is right for me. This napkin disclosed your secret. Then I said, this innocent places herself outside the law. *Vraiment!* I love her well enough to follow her. I place myself outside the law, also!"

Here she looks at him, a great love coming into her eyes, and shudders. "To sacrifice yourself!"

"No," replies Maurice solemnly, "*to save you!*" and

getting her in his arms, he murmurs in her ear, that grows pink like a shell, blushing under his caresses: "I said, here is a romantic child who loves liberty, for which—God bless her! Some one interested in her downfall has taught this innocent that crime for the sake of liberty is justice and virtue."

Here she cries out to him: "That was never told me till I was theirs body and soul—till I had sworn their solemn oath before the altar of my mother country!—then it was she taught me——"

"She—who?" interrupts Maurice.

"My governess, Marguerite de Brian, the one you sent to my father."

Then de Verney gasps under his breath: "My God, what infamy!" and to his love is added self-reproach that he had risked the future of this being he adores upon a single letter.

Of this the girl takes no heed, but mutters on: "Then it was she taught me that, if liberty was a right of Russia, I could do no wrong in aiding my country to obtain it; that for liberty assassination was execution—murder, justice!"

At this Maurice cries out: "Then you will do this crime?" and turning Ora's face to his, gazes into her blue eyes, and mutters: "You could not murder——"

"Not even for Russia," says the girl; and she tells him in a few words how the woman had taught her as a little child to "love liberty."

"So as a woman she could destroy you. In happier lands she would have made you a monster of vice; now, in this accursed country, she makes you a patriot. Ah, I love you all the more, because you have sinned so little, you do not know crime at sight. But if you do not kill your victim, you break your oath——"

"And forfeit my life!" cries Ora, springing up. "That is why you must go—NOW! That is why I can never be your wife." Here she turns her head away, and mutters: "I belong to Death."

"Tut, tut!" laughs Maurice, who will not let her despair. "I'd beat Death in a race for a pretty woman any day," and getting her in his arms again, cries: "You love me. Give me the chance to save you,—will you? You would like to be happy with me, would you not?"

"Would not I!" cries the girl, who is now sobbing under his kisses; "WOULD NOT I! There is a letter on that table addressed to you. I wrote that. I could not die till I had told you that I loved you, and if I lived I would be——" But here she tears herself from him, and cries: "*If I live?* The hand of death is on me now! Look out of that window! I cannot escape! There, almost at my door, stands Feodor, Dimitri's valet, waiting to see I do my work; beyond there—all around the house, to prevent my victim's escape and mine—the second circle." And, as he approaches at her words, she mutters: "Don't you think I would have fled with you before—two days ago, when I broke my heart and left you—if I had not been surrounded by spies, and feared to involve you in my fate?"

"Our fates are one, Ora," he says to her sadly. Then seeing she is right, and that, even if they got from the house, without passport they could hardly journey far unquestioned by the police, he mutters: "And now!" thinking very hard.

"Now," cries the girl, "you must go!"

"Now," he cries back to her, "I stay here and save you!" Then, despite entreaties from her white lips that he leave her to her fate, he reads her instructions, that this innocent conspirator has left upon her table. These are simple and to the point:

"Ora, chosen by the will of God!

"The criminal condemned to die will hand you in person the order for his execution. Disobey, and you die yourself. Your weapons are in package marked ✠.

"NATIONAL COMMITTEE."

"Ah, your weapons!" he says, pointing to a package lying also on the table. "You have not opened it!"

"Of what use?" mutters the girl. "I shall not use them. Those outside, seeing I do not obey, will simply come in and kill us both!"

"Then, if the condemned is to come here," he whispers, "you must expect a visitor?"

"No."

"Think!"

"Oh, yes; but I have written to him," cries Ora. "It's only my cousin Dimitri."

Then Maurice de Verney knows what Hermann told him is true. He mutters: "Only Dimitri Menchikoff —*only* your heir!" and gives a sudden cry: "I understand!" for now he has guessed the cunningness of Platoff's plot. "Ora," he continues very solemnly, "if Prince Dimitri Menchikoff enters your doors, barring accidents, you've but two alternatives—death or Siberia! Dimitri is the prefect of the secret police—he has been condemned to death by the nihilists—he is the man you are selected to assassinate."

To this the girl mutters: "Kill my cousin! monstrous!"

"It is because he is your cousin that you are to kill him," returns Maurice quickly. "You kill him, and are punished for the crime, and who becomes heir to your vast estates?"

"Prince Sergius Platoff!" she cries, a gleam of understanding flashing over her face.

"You break your oath, you do not assassinate Dimitri, and these nihilists kill both you and him. Again Prince Sergius Platoff becomes your heir. And who gains by your destruction and Dimitri's? Prince Sergius Platoff, the head of your circle, the man who placed your instructions on that table; his wife, who taught you to be a nihilist; and Zamaroff, his creditor, who palmed on you the fatal lot," he shoots out, an awful indignation in his voice; for she has grown even paler than she was before she heard this, and has muttered: "I understand now. My wealth has destroyed me!"

"Pish!" he goes on, "I've beaten rogues before—I'll do it again. Dimitri must not come here. You have written to him, you say—what is in the letter?"

"There it is on the table," says the girl despairingly. "It is in answer to his command that I become his wife."

"Ah!"

"In it I return to him his marriage contract, and tell him I hate him for his cruelty, and despise him for his vice; that I'll never be his wife—so help me Heaven!" cries the girl, beginning to look proud and haughty, as she thinks of this brute who has commanded her to be his.

"Then, you hardly think Dimitri would visit you

to-day, if he saw this?" returns Maurice quietly, though his eyes beam with admiration.

"If he had the pride of a man, he'd never enter my gates."

"Then Dimitri shall have it. If he doesn't come here, you are saved for this day; and somehow, please God, I'll have you out of Russia to-night, as I would have done before had you not fled from me," returns Maurice, a little hope in his voice.

On this the girl mutters: "Have pity; don't reproach me—I did it for you!" as de Verney sounds a little hand-bell, which is immediately answered by Vassilissa.

To her he whispers to first go to the stables and order a carriage ready; for he thinks it may be of use, and will take no chance of its not being prepared. Next he tells her to walk openly down the avenue, as if on some errand connected with the house, and wait near the gate until she sees Dimitri approach, then to give him this letter, which, as he hands it to her, he notes is in a very large envelope, and bulky, with the marriage contract as he supposes. "Do this," he says, "for your mistress's life!" And the girl being gone he turns to Ora, who mutters to him: "Can I do nothing to aid myself?" and astounds her.

"Certainly," he says; "find the remainder of those napkins."

She looks at him in astonishment for a moment, and then replies: "I have only one—mine!" giving him her badge of guilt.

"There are more of these in this room," answers Maurice sharply. "Do you think Zamaroff and the prince did not leave their tickets to Siberia to you when they were here? Here's two of the six—yours and mine. Feodor, as he stands outside prepared to fulfill his oath, is probably idiot enough to carry his in his pocket. Louise—I mean Marguerite—the princess—— By the bye, where is your aunt at present?" This last is said sharply, as if some new idea has entered his head.

Here the girl astounds him with "She is in that music-room. She and that Englishman, who is so devoted to her that she can't get him to leave the house. How is it they let you stay here?"

"Who?"

"The Prince, Zamaroff, and the others."

"By George! I imagine they think I've gone. My carriage drove away," he remarks. And his guess is true; for, seeing de Verney's carriage leave the house, Sergius, whose eyesight was not remarkably good, had made sure the Frenchman had left them to their business.

"How do you know the princess is there?" he asks, pointing to the music-room.

"It was part of the plan: she's to play the Russian hymn, so that those outside can know that he is dead."

As if in mockery to their despair, at this moment there comes to them, faintly from this room, the sweet strains of the mazourka that sounded in their ears when their hearts first beat together, that night at the ball on the Frontanka.

It acts like a whip-lash on Maurice; he mutters: "Find the napkins. *Quick!*"

Together they search the room—de Verney making his examination with the same methods and logic he had used years ago in France, and finding under the cushions of a sofa, that had been disturbed but not apparently sat down on, one more; Ora moving about excitedly, but without method, and unsuccessfully. Once she mutters: "This is a game. It is so exciting!" for, with all her brilliant mind, she has not been long in the world of society, and is still in many things almost a child.

And, her very innocence making her dearer than ever to this man, who will protect and save her even with his life, if God will but let him, he clinches his teeth and mutters: "Too deuced exciting! The stakes are too high!" and still searches on, though at times his eyes will wander to her—she is so beautiful as she moves about in careless grace, in this white robe that makes her look like a bride, her bare arms and shoulders flashing in the sunlight.

Finally he has examined all the room, and has found no more. The piano suddenly has stopped; he fears Louise may be watching, and goes to the door of the music-room; he can hear Beresford's voice, and looks very cautiously in. The young Englishman is bending over the princess as she sits at the piano; and, looking sharply at him, he sees, tied round his neck in a true-lover's knot, the beautiful silken web that carries with it con-

demnation by a military tribunal. Louise has kindly disposed of hers to her admirer! He softly closes the door, and more softly locks it and pockets the key. Then he turns to Ora, who has been watching him with surprise, and mutters: "I have three napkins. Feodor has one, Beresford another. I must take my chances on the sixth. I am told you have some chloroform?"

"Yes," says Ora, "for my headaches."

"Then a basin and the chloroform. Quick!"

The girl, with a graceful gesture, tosses some roses out of an ornamental bowl, gives it to him, and, running into her bedroom, returns with a vial of chloroform, questioning him with her eyes.

"Now," he replies, placing the napkins in the bowl, and pouring the chemical upon them, "adieu, sympathetic ink! In ten minutes these will be innocent of conspiracy!"

And the fumes of the drug being potent, he carries the bowl and its contents to a window overlooking the grounds, and places it upon the sill, remarking: "This stuff might make me stupid, and I need all my wits."

As he does this, Ora steps beside him and points to the fire, crying: "Burn the accursed things!"

"What," he answers, "destroy the evidence of guilt, and thus prove you know it to be an evidence! Ah, no! Make it innocent. These napkins that were our danger may then be our safety."

"And what next?" mutters the girl.

"Next I must find that missing napkin," he says; but, as he does so, Vassilissa, who has run up to the latticed balcony by a flight of steps outside, comes in, pale and breathless, and gasps out:

"Dimitri's coming up the stairs now!"

"You delivered the letter?" says Maurice.

"Yes."

"He read it?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"He laughed, that was all; he laughed awfully—as if in triumph."

"Ora, you are sure you sealed that letter when you wrote it?" asks de Verney of his sweetheart, who is looking astounded.

"I don't know," she mutters, "I was so agitated."

"Then," Maurice says gently, "there was something in that letter you did not place there. If I have destroyed you, forgive me."

And she answers with her eyes: "With my whole heart," for Dimitri is just coming in the door, and Vassilissa has slunk frightened away; while de Verney, carefully keeping out of this man's view, is moving cautiously toward the entrance, which is easy, as Menchikoff's eyes are fastened in one longing, devouring gaze upon this beautiful creature who turns to meet him, and whose very loathing will only make his triumph greater.

Thus, unseen, Maurice occupies the door by which Dimitri entered, and stands at his back, while the military policeman, who is dressed in the full uniform of the Guard, laughs out at the shrinking girl before him: "A cordial welcome your maid brought me to the gate, Cousin Ora," and would kiss her hand.

This she keeps from him, and says very coldly: "I had hoped my letter would have made your visit unnecessary."

"On the contrary," smiles Dimitri, who is now drawing off his gloves, and apparently very much pleased with something, "it made my visit both imperative and official!"

"You will not take my answer?"

"Not the one you gave."

"But you shall take it," the girl cries, and Maurice sees her form grow larger with haughty pride. "I am Ora Lapuschkin, countess in my own right, and mistress of myself; and I tell you, Prince Dimitri Menchikoff, I will never fulfill the marriage contract that binds me to you."

"Pardon me," mutters Dimitri, after a little pause of perhaps astonishment. "Your letter said nothing of the kind. You simply sent me, in an envelope addressed by you to me, this paper and this napkin," and with a little chuckle produces them.

Both de Verney and Ora gaze at him astounded. But Maurice does more: he quickly locks the door at his back, and, pocketing the key, they are now cut off from the immediate entrance of the nihilists outside; for he knows that the cunning of Platoff has added some new and curious danger to his niece's peril,

"This napkin says nothing," murmurs Dimitri, with the air of a cat playing with a mouse. "This paper says THIS," and he reads in official voice: "Prince Dimitri Menchikoff, colonel in the army of the Czar, coward who flogged women in Odessa, brute who tortured political prisoners at Kharkoff, wretch unworthy to live, prepare to die. You are condemned by order of the Russian National Committee."

Then he pauses, and eyes the girl as a snake does a bird, and jeers: "A deuced polite answer to a loving suitor for your hand."

"I—I never wrote that letter. I swear it," gasps Ora; for she knows Platoff has done this thing to her to compel her to kill this man for her own salvation.

"Then who did it?" cries Dimitri in an awful voice, striding up to her; but, ere he seizes her, another form is between them, and Maurice de Verney is smiling into his face, "I DID!"

"*You?*" cries Dimitri, staggering back astounded; then he says more slowly, an ugly look on his face: "I thought you were leaving St. Petersburg. Did I not tell you the climate was unhealthy for you?" A moment after he mutters shortly: "Your story is impossible!"

"I'll prove it," replies de Verney coolly; and ringing a bell, Vassilissa enters timidly, and gazes shiveringly at the head of secret police.

"Who gave you a letter to deliver to Prince Menchikoff?" asks Maurice.

"You did, sir," answers the girl, and leaves the room as if glad to get away.

"You see," murmurs de Verney.

"Pardon me. I do not see."

"Then I'll explain," continues Maurice. "Discovering a plot against your life, and having a fellow feeling for you—I was once connected with the French secret police myself—I sent you that warning, and, to make you appreciate it thoroughly, worded it after the usual style of those anonymous messages."

"But your description of me is so true," laughs the Russian.

"True that you flogged women!" gasps Maurice; but he cuts this short, thinking in his mind that this man is one of the wretches who make nihilism almost a

virtue. As for Ora, her eyes become more scornful than ever.

"But the napkin?" mutters the guardsman, dropping easily into a chair, as if he were fatigued with the subject.

"Was sent you to prevent your visiting her to-day. I knew the letter would not alone deter a man of your courage," explains de Verney.

"I see nothing in it."

"You have not been a policeman as long as I. I will instruct you," says Maurice. "It was by this." He takes the napkin to the fire, and holds it before the flame. "I discovered your death was—*here!*"

"By St. Vladimir!" cries Dimitri.

"Tell me what you discover," laughs de Verney; for he wants this man to think him not too greatly interested in this business.

But here Dimitri astounds him. He does not rise from his seat, which is at least a dozen feet from the fire, but reads the nihilist order rapidly and easily.

"You read from that distance!" gasps Maurice. "You have the eye of a hawk."

"For criminals—yes!" laughs the military policeman. Then he cries: "I see enough to order the arrest of all who hold these badges of treason!" and springs from his chair as if he would leave the room to give some command.

But Maurice stops him by saying quietly: "That would only mean your cousin—and me." And Ora, who has been watching these two men with panting interest, suddenly cries out: "All the napkins are in this room!"

"Except one that young Englishman Beresford wears about his neck as innocently as you carried this," interjects de Verney; then he says with almost a sneer: "Do you suppose *after use* a man keeps in his pocket what will condemn him to death? This nihilist circle has kindly thrown all the proof against it upon this innocent girl and me!"

While this has been going on, Dimitri has been biting his lips in thought. He now says harshly: "Ah, I see! I shall order the arrest of all about here, except those who have these things in their possession!"

"Ah! Now you are becoming brilliant, prince," cries de Verney with an unnatural laugh. "Between the *old*

head of police and the *young* head of police, we'll astonish these conspirators."

"I'll order their arrest at once," returns Dimitri, striding up to the door.

And Ora, coming to Maurice, murmurs: "We swim!"

At this he gives her a perplexed look, and mutters: "We're drowning! I cannot understand his opera-glass eyes, and his lack of surprise at the hidden message on the napkin."

Then he cries out suddenly: "If you break down that door, you will go to your death!" For Menchikoff, having tried the lock, has drawn out his revolver, and, after snapping each chamber of it, has thrown it down with a curse, muttering: "My pistol has been tampered with!"

"Come here," whispers de Verney, leading him to a window. "Look carefully out," and shows him the situation—the second circle about the pavilion, and Feodor waiting to give the signal if Ora does not keep her oath, that they may come in and kill them both.

At this Dimitri mutters, astonished: "Feodor, my valet—a traitor? Why, he cringed to my riding-whip yesterday!"

"That is the reason your pistol is not loaded; that is the reason he will have your blood *to-day!*" mutters de Verney, in an awful whisper.

"Then I've a pleasant surprise for Mr. Feodor!" laughs Menchikoff, though Maurice notes his cheek has turned pale with some sudden emotion. "Look a little farther, and you see——"

"A number of men surrounding the house, their horses concealed in the shrubberies of these grounds."

"My secret police. Do you think I came unguarded after being condemned to assassination, Monsieur Frenchman?" jeers the Russian. "Do you see a man under this window, lying in that laurel bush?"

"He looks like one of my countrymen!" mutters de Verney, astonished.

"He is Monsieur Victor Regnier, a sub-lieutenant in the Third Section."

"He was once under me in Paris," mutters Maurice. "He can be trusted." But this gives him no confidence; he knows Regnier will obey orders upon him as well as any one else.

"I know that," says Dimitri. "I've got even the bridges to this island guarded now. I have but to blow my whistle, and Monsieur Regnier has my police on these nihilists;" and he shows a silver whistle secured by a silken cord round his neck.

"Not before these nihilists can break down that door, and kill both you and us," says Maurice hastily.

Looking over the situation, the Russian policeman murmurs: "I believe you are right," and leaves the window.

Here Ora, who has been listening breathlessly to them, suddenly utters: "Dimitri, stay here! You are safe so long as you stay in this room."

"In this room! Why?" asks Menchikoff hurriedly, a new light coming into his eyes.

"Because, until you leave this room," returns the girl, now only anxious to save the man who persecutes her, "*the nihilist circle will not know that you have not been killed by the member appointed to do it!*"

At this de Verney, who has been trying to warn her, moans to himself: "Peste! Her kind heart has ruined us!"

And the Russian brute she would defend suddenly cries out in a stern voice: "Ah, ha! Then the member appointed to murder me is in this room. Then either you or that Frenchman is the nihilist to assassinate me!" And his gleaming saber flashes out as he strides up to her, who would save him, and mutters: "Which of you has conspired against the Czar?" But as he does so, Maurice stands between them, and says in a hoarse voice: "*Again, it is I!*"

And Ora cries out, astounded at him:

"*You?*"

At this Dimitri sneers: "This might have been expected from a cursed French republican!"

While Ora cries out again: "You shall not sacrifice yourself for me. I am the guilty one. I am the nihilist appointed to kill you, Dimitri Menchikoff. Who else would take more joy in your death?"

This last is said desperately.

But de Verney, who forces himself to calm as she grows excited, coolly says: "This excitement has deranged her. That delicate girl murder you, a strong

man—the idea is monstrous! The child raves. It was I; or how did I know the secret of those napkins? I joined the circle merely to warn you, and being connected with the French legation——"

"You have your passport showing who you are?" asks Menchikoff suddenly.

At this question, Maurice, remembering the use to which he has put it, mutters:

"I have not; but you know perfectly well who I am."

"Pardon me," remarks Dimitri, with a polite shrug of the shoulders. "Without your passport I decline officially to know anything, *except that you have confessed a crime!*"

"But the French Embassy will know!" cries the chevalier with flashing eyes.

"Only that Maurice de Verney has disappeared!" sneers Menchikoff. And then he goes on, an awful significance in his tone: "If I arrest you to-day, to-morrow you are *nothing!* But the chain of convicts for Siberia will number one more. In that vast frozen desert there's some out-of-the-way vault, in the blackness of a quicksilver mine, where *I* can hide you, and *France* can't find you!"

He throws a jeering smile on Maurice, who mutters: "I understand. I've known such things before."

But now Ora is in front of the destroyer, her face on fire with generous sacrifice, crying: "Maurice, this shall not be!—Dimitri, I am the culprit! Here is my proof—the order for your assassination!" and she holds the paper out to him.

"That is mine!" cries de Verney hoarsely, striving to seize it; but she, avoiding his grasp, shoves the document right under Dimitri's eyes, that seem to gloat over this enthusiastic girl.

"Does it read so?" she goes on. "'Ora, chosen by the will of God!' *Ora!* That is *my* name! Deny that, Maurice, if you can! ORA—you see the name ORA!"

At this Menchikoff laughs a little under his breath. "How you each of you convict yourself, and do not clear the other." Then his face works with a sudden pang, and he hisses: "You love each other!"

And Maurice answers this by "Listen to the truth!

Prince Platoff, his wife, and Zamaroff, his creditor, are all interested in this lady's and your death. You know as well as I that her estates are very rich."

"You have observed that!" sneers Dimitri. "Frenchmen have a taste for money as well as for beauty!"

Neither the girl nor her lover winces at this fling; it is no more to them than a mosquito bite to a man burning alive.

Maurice, unheeding the interruption, says on: "The people I have mentioned are part of the circle which ordered Ora to kill you. Had she obeyed that command, they would then have denounced her; and on her execution, or banishment, Prince Sergius Platoff would have become the owner of these estates." Then, indignation coming to him at the thought of such infinite treachery to a helpless girl, he cries out: "This plot has degenerated from a political crime to a social one. It is as much against this child as against you. You are bound to her by ties of blood; aid me to save this innocent from these traitors, both to the Czar and to humanity!"

And Dimitri, who seems to have caught his enthusiasm, cries back to him: "I will!—both save her, and punish them!"

And for one moment Maurice believes him, and mutters: "God be thanked!" For he cannot conceive that any man, looking at this girl whose innocent heart beams through her eyes, could aid those who would make her a criminal, and give to her the punishment of a felon.

"I shall write an order," goes on Dimitri, after a moment's thought, drawing a table nearer the window, and seating himself with his back to the light, but also keeping the other two in front of him. Then he says: "Ora, bring me pen, ink, and paper;" and the girl doing this, he laughs to de Verney: "This is the first time she ever obeyed me!" After this for a couple of minutes he writes rapidly, and finally reads to them:

"SUB-LIEUTENANT REGNIER:

"Quietly draw your men about this building, and arrest all who do not present to you a napkin similar to the one I throw you with this. It shall be a safe passport for this house and grounds. Do not disturb me in this room, till you have arrested all outside of it. This shall be your warrant for your action. MENCHIKOFF,

"Prefect Third Section."

Then quickly rolling this order up in a napkin, he carefully drops it out of the window; and Ora, looking after it, whispers: "Your officer has picked it up; he makes a signal he understands. Dimitri, God bless you! – We have the napkins; Maurice, we can pass the police—we are safe!"

This outburst of hope Menchikoff strikes down with despair; he has crossed the room, a mocking smile on his Eastern face. He murmurs: "That is as you and Monsieur de Verney elect. In half an hour the nihilists outside will all be seized; you can give them no warning. And if they killed me, that would not save you; for at the bottom of that order I tossed to my lieutenant, I wrote: 'If I am found dead, arrest every man, woman, and child about this house. My murder has been caused by a Frenchman who is here, and my cousin the Countess Lapuschkin. See they are punished without court-martial!'"

Here he grips his saber a little more tightly, for all men fear the desperation of despair, and de Verney has an awful look on his face; while Ora gasps: "Punishment without trial—but the law!"

And Dimitri answers back: "Now nothing is against the law for *me!* everything against the law for *you!*" Then he goes on: "You are now in my power, you cursed Frenchman; but I offer you safety. You are, I believe, a suitor for the hand of this *criminal?*" and he points to Ora.

The girl shivers at the term, but says proudly: "An *accepted* suitor!"

"That makes the matter easier," laughs Dimitri.

"I have in my hand her letter," mutters Maurice very slowly, as if in thought; "but have not as yet read it;" and he picks up quickly from the table the note addressed to him.

"That letter says," cries the girl in generous enthusiasm, "that if I ever wed, I will wed Maurice de Verney, a man too noble for you to even understand, Dimitri Menchikoff!"

"He is a Frenchman! You shall see how noble he is!" laughs the policeman, for he judges others by himself.

At this insult in the presence of the girl he loves,

Maurice cries hoarsely, "Monsieur!" and would spring at Dimitri, who half raises his saber; but, controlling himself by a mighty effort, he mutters: "Pardon me! I have not yet heard your proposition."

"It is simply this," remarks Menchikoff. "I offer you both safety, if you, Monsieur de Verney, release this lady from her promise to be your wife; and if you, Ora Lapuschkin, then consent to marry me *to-day!* Otherwise, a Russian dungeon to-night for you both, and to-morrow the punishment of convicted assassins."

At this the girl, shuddering at the eyes he casts on her, cries: "Monstrous! I have already answered your suit. I have already said no!"

But the Frenchman seems to grow uncertain under this terrible threat, and asks in a faltering voice: "But if I accept your proposition, Prince Dimitri, what proof will you give me that you will keep your word?"

Then Ora gives a little start, and gasps: "Can you hesitate? O Maurice, you call this love!"

And Menchikoff laughs in mockery: "It is a Frenchman's love."

But to these words de Verney only replies, a little cringe in his manner: "I ask a proof."

"I have in my pocket-book some blank passports signed by General Gourko, governor of St. Petersburg. I fill one out for you, and you depart from Russia to-night. You thus escape from the nihilists you have betrayed, and this lady's property, which might again ensnare you. The passport shall be my proof!"

To this de Verney mutters: "Let me think!"

And Ora looks at him astounded, for his voice has grown quite humble.

"In any case, this criminal's estates will be confiscated, or pass to me," continues Dimitri, in the same mocking manner he has had since he has felt this man and woman in his clutches. "And I know all Frenchmen expect a *dot.*"

"So we do! Beauty without money is a very cheap article," returns the chevalier with a cringing grin.

"Maurice!" cries the girl, wringing her hands at this atrocious sentiment, "I am beginning to despise you!"

But de Verney, after one shudder, in which his lips form, but do not utter, the words, "My God!" sud-

denly says, as if his mind were fixed: "I can now give you my answer!"

And noting the spasm of agony on his face at her contempt, Ora mistakes him; and throwing her arms round his neck, careless of Dimitri's presence, she cries: "Maurice, I trust you. I love you!" and turning round on his tempter—who is grinding his teeth at the sight of her beauty, passion, and abandon—says proudly, one white arm encircling the man she loves, and the other held out in haughty gesture: "Know, Prince Menchikoff, that this gentleman has my plighted troth; that Ora Lapuschkin's word, once given, is *eternal!* I refuse your offer. Siberia! death!—BUT NEVER MARRIAGE WITH YOU!"

Then this haughty being turns tenderly to de Verney, and would lavish on him caresses in her despair; but he smites her down with a French shrug of the shoulders, and mocking words; for he laughs: "*Mon Dieu!* how noble, but how foolish!"

Then the bitterness of death comes near to her, and she staggers from him, astonishment struggling with contempt in her face; for Platoff's story of his refusal to marry her governess because she was poor comes back to her, and she looks to see if the man she loves is a fortune-hunter and a coward.

Here Dimitri, who has placed his hand in the pocket of his military cloak, smiles and says: "These were brought me for inspection to-day. Carelessly, I placed them in my pocket; but now they may be useful." And he draws out a pair of handcuffs, together with a box that looks like a jewel-case. The latter he puts on the table; with the former he approaches Maurice, and murmurs: "Monsieur de Verney?" but is careful to keep the point of his naked saber always toward him.

"You think those would suit my wrists? I do not," laughs the chevalier, who has now become very light, laughing, and sycophantic in his manner to this Russian bear.

"I give you your choice—these and Siberia! or—the passport and Paris!" and, as he says this, there is a ring of triumph in Dimitri's voice.

"*Parbleu!* The choice is not a difficult one—Siberia and Paris? I choose—*Paris!*" cries de Verney lightly.

As he does so, a quiver of despair runs through him, for he sees the face of Ora Lapuschkin grow as cold and haughty to him as it has been to Dimitri, though her mouth is wrung by agony, and her eyes, that are so large and blue and honest, have red circles of suffering round them, not at her own bitter fate, but at the degradation of this man she had thought noble—the throwing down of this idol of her heart.

"You resign all claim to this lady's hand?" says Menchikoff sharply.

And Maurice has strength enough to reply in his same insouciant manner: "Her estates will be confiscated. Why not? I am a Frenchman! Here is the letter that contains her promise; here is a fire!" And striding quickly over to the blazing logs, he burns the little love-note to ashes, and coming cringing back to Dimitri, fawns on him, as if for safety: "Have I earned my passport?"

At this Ora utters one sharp gasp of pain, and the Russian policeman mocks her: "You see this French *gentleman* has resigned your hand!"

And she growing very proud in her despair, from her white lips come words as cold as ice: "It is not *he* who renounces me. I renounce *him;* for I despise him more than I do you!"

She confronts Dimitri as she says this, and does not even look at de Verney; had she done so, she might have pitied him, for his face has more of suffering than hers.

Then Menchikoff remarks in a business way: "The police are already arresting your fellow-criminals;"—a faint and distant commotion coming in the windows to give proof to his words. "You will not have a long time in which to choose, Countess Ora." Here he looks at her beauty, which is perhaps more pleasing to him now than before—his Eastern blood liking unavailing resistance in women—and goes on very pointedly, opening the jewel-case and letting her see the bauble sparkle: "Behold!—a beautiful bracelet of gold for my promised wife! See!—a pair of iron ones for the wrist of a confessed criminal! Your choice—pretty one?"

"It is made!" says the girl, as white and cold now as a marble statue; but oh, so much more beautiful! "I will be the bride neither of the man who deserted the woman

he once lied to when he said he loved, nor the man who would degrade a woman as you would. There are nobler hearts in the mines of Siberia than that of your Prince Dimitri or that gentleman there *who prefers Paris. I choose Siberia!*" And her nostrils dilate with contempt for the brute who glares at her, and the unhappy creature who cannot look her in the face from shame or misery or some other abject emotion.

"Then, in the name of the Czar, I arrest you, Ora Lapuschkin, a confessed assassin!" hisses Dimitri, and prepares to clasp the handcuffs round her beautiful white wrists, remarking: "They're a little large for you, I fear, my pretty felon."

At this the girl shudders. "Dimitri, I am your cousin; I will go with you. For God's sake, don't degrade me—with them!" and starts back a step, eyeing him as a dove does a hawk.

But he goes on coolly trying to make them smaller, but now starts and holds his gleaming saber, not raised to cut, but giving point, ready to spit any one flying at him; for there is a creature with bloodshot eyes about to spring toward him; but at sight of certain death this creature is a cringing thing, that, coming near, whines: "Let me assist you."

"By Heaven, you're more of a Frenchman than I thought you," laughs the Russian brute to the French cur, and tosses him the handcuffs, but keeps his sword still ready in his hand.

"Yes. I was once very quick with these things. See, I can soon make them small enough," and de Verney works away at the manacles.

"What do you expect for this?" jeers Dimitri.

"*Only* my passport! You will give *me* my passport?" says the coward anxiously.

"You want your passport, Frenchman? You shall have it *when you place those irons on that felon's wrists.* Clap 'em on her! Then, by the Lord, how she will despise you! CLAP 'EM ON!"

Then an awful silence comes upon them all; as, looking like a craven, his eyes deep in their sockets, his head bowed with shame, de Verney, who is like a man no more, turns to do the brute's bidding on the girl who stands looking at him, her eyes two beams of scorn

that would strike him penitent if he would but look at them.

Till now this interview has been all under their breaths ; for Dimitri has been cautious, fearing the nihilists might know he lived, and Maurice's speech has been low with intensity, and Ora's breaking heart did not cry very loud. But now the victim's agony is too awful to keep in.

She screams : " From my father's friend ?—from my lover ? Degradation ! You make my fate easy, I despise you *so !*" Then, as he seizes one white arm and drags her nearer Dimitri, she struggles and prays : " I will not be degraded—not by YOU ! Not by YOU, MAURICE ! *Think how I loved you !*"

And he writhes, the sweat of a more awful agony than hers upon his brow. " She struggles like a tigress ! Your assistance, prince ! to hold her wrists ! "

Then, in the triumph of this moment, Dimitri, crying : " Now you ARE a Frenchman ! " his jeers mingling with Ora's panting gasps and de Verney's half-frenzied laugh, drops his saber, and seizing in his brutish hands those two white, delicate, struggling wrists of Ora's, holds them tight, bruising and crushing them together for their degradation.

But, as he does so :—like lightning he feels two manacles snap upon his own wrists ; and, writhing in his bonds, this barbaric brute is tossed crashing down among the fallen bric-à-brac of an overturned table.

But, half stunned as he is, his wandering senses can still catch a mocking laugh in his ear : " BY HEAVEN ! NOW I AM A FRENCHMAN ! " and see a white-robed girl, turning eyes suffused with love upon this thing whose foot is on his neck, and crying with a scream of surprised joy : " Forgive me for doubting you ! Thank God ! My idol still ! " and hear de Verney, in the voice of a man once more, laugh : " COULDN'T YOU GUESS ? THE BRUTE HAD BLANK PASSPORTS AND A BIG SABER ! "

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LAST ROUND!

AT these words Dimitri struggles to his knees and tries to get his whistle to his mouth; but at his first move he hears "Ah! would you?" and is dashed to the floor again, choked nearly to death, and his whistle, pocket-book, and papers taken from him. Then, bound into an inert mass, with cords torn down from the window-curtains, he is carried into the bedroom of the boudoir, and tossed helpless upon the lace coverlet and pillows of Ora's dainty bed.

This is done with the greatest rapidity, for moments are very precious to de Verney now. He leads Ora to her little dressing-room and says: "Quick! pack up your jewels and a change of linen, and throw sables over your white dress! It will be cold to-night at sea." Then he sits down, and taking three blank passports, signed by General Gourko, from Dimitri's pocket-book, he fills them out, one for Ora, one for Vassilissa, and one for himself—for he has determined to pass the police on the grounds by means of the three napkins, and the police on the bridge by Gourko's passports, and, getting Ora and Vassilissa on the yacht, to steam for all life is worth out of the Neva toward the high seas. This game of life and death is only a matter of time. If Menchikoff can telegraph to Cronstadt, he may be chased, but he hardly thinks caught—the *Sophie* is so fleet.

While doing this, he once thinks he hears Dimitri in a faint voice calling to his police for aid, and starts up to gag him; but this is not repeated, and he goes on filling up the passports—writing for his life.

As he finishes these, Ora, a small valise in her hand, says: "I'm ready." And he cries: "Come!"

As they turn from the little apartment, Vassilissa staggers in from the boudoir and mutters: "Dimitri's dead!"

"DEAD!" shrieks Ora.

"Dead as a saint!" answers the peasant woman. "He was calling to the police. I gagged him and strangled him to death—though I didn't mean it—but he's stiff as ice!"

"Then we must get out of here before the police discover it, that's all. You remember his orders, if he is found dead! All the faster now!" And with this de Verney leaves the two trembling women, and strides into the boudoir and across to the window-sill to get the napkins in order to pass the police within the grounds; but, placing his hand in the bowl, he gives a start of amazed terror, and grows white. The chloroform is there, but the napkins are gone!

They are indispensable—they must be found! and he goes hurriedly about the room searching for them everywhere, but not finding them. While now from the music-room the piano is sounding loudly, for Louise has heard first the noise of struggle in this apartment, and then Ora's scream of "DEAD!" and is playing, as a signal to the circle outside, the grand old strains of the Russian hymn.

He runs to the door of the dressing-room and calls to Vassilissa, asking her what she has done with the napkins.

And to his question Ora comes out with pale face and says that Vassilissa has fainted; then gasps: "They are in that vase!—there! with the chloroform!"

"Of course," mutters de Verney. "Go back and revive your maid;" for now there is a knocking on the door of the music-room, and a voice is calling: "What's the row in there? Why are we locked in?"

At these words de Verney suddenly mutters: "Beresford—one passport—I'll save her!" and turns and unlocks the door of the music-room as Cuthbert cries again: "Vassilissa, or somebody, let us out!"

As he does so Beresford walks out, and Maurice, forcing a laugh, says: "A little pale in the gills—eh?" for Cuthbert has an anxious and perplexed expression. The piano is still sounding. Louise is still playing Russian hymns; and, hearing no false notes or tremble in her execution, even in the uncertainty of this awful moment, Maurice can't help admiring this woman's superb nerves, as he closes the door upon her.

"What has happened? I heard strange noises!" says Cuthbert nervously.

"Oh! ah! my cough!" cries Maurice. "I have cold, like you! Nasty climate, this of Russia," and he plays

with the silken damask wrapped about Beresford's neck in a longing, covetous way. "You have your throat bandaged also. Why, you did take your souvenir from the tea-table like the rest, after all?"

"No! this is a little *gage d'amour!*" murmurs Beresford; "but the——"

"Ah! from Madame la Princesse? You are a sly fellow—a true-lover's knot!"

"Yes, but it wasn't coughing I heard in here. It was a cry about death!" interjects Cuthbert.

"Death! Oh, yes!" mutters de Verney, eyeing the young fellow seriously, his hands all the time gently untying the napkin about the Englishman's neck. "By Jove! Prince Platoff was here a few moments ago, looking for you, and swearing to kill you, and——" he points significantly to the music-room, "that's the reason I locked you in."

"Ah, much obliged, don't yer know!" returns Cuthbert. "Do the same for you, my boy, some time!"—and would leave the room.

But Maurice seizes him, and says solemnly: "Not with *this* on! The prince saw her give you this!" and he draws away from Beresford's neck the gage of love he has untied. "If Platoff saw you wearing this, there would be blood!"

"Ah! very well, if you think so," murmurs the English attaché; "I'm not afraid of any Russian that's born, but I don't like to make trouble in families, don't yer see! Take care of it for me—ain't she a fetcher?"

Then Maurice, unlocking the door of the boudoir for him, suddenly asks: "You have your passport showing your connection with the British Embassy with you?"

"Yes—in my pocket—always carry it now, the police are so inquisitive! Beastly nuisance!" With these words in his mouth, and carelessly lighting a cigar, Mr. Beresford saunters out into the grounds, to very shortly get a sensation, leaving de Verney gloating over his stolen property and muttering: "*One* passport—I can save *her!*"

Then he strides to the dressing-room, and cries: "Ora—come!" But she is already at the door, looking at him with curious eyes, and saying: "Vassilissa is recovering, but not yet ready to travel!"

"Then you must not wait for her!" he says hurriedly —for he knows the time is growing very short. "There is your passport and your traveling-bag—and here's what will give you safety while leaving this house!" and he puts into her hand what he stole from Beresford. "Go at once to your carriage, and drive like the wind into town—when there——"

But she interrupts him, whispering: "But you are coming too?"

"No! I must wait for Vassilissa, and follow on horseback?"

"But Vassilissa?"

"She will come with me!"

"On horseback?"

"Why not! She's half Cossack!" he cries impatiently. "When there—at once to the French Embassy; ask for my old servant, François; tell him to forward the paper I gave him, by means of the French minister, to the Czar in person!"—for he thinks Hermann's confession may yet save the girl's estates. "Then give him this."

He writes in his pocket-book six lines and forces it into her hand; then cries "*Go!*"

But she mutters: "I will wait for you!"

At this he looks sternly at her and cries: "Obey me! I command you—go—instantly!" and leads her to the door. "That paper must reach François at once! And now——" here he kisses her passionately and murmurs, "*Au revoir!*"

"Till when?" cries the girl to him. "When?"

But he doesn't answer this, but simply says, "*Au revoir!*" in a muffled and broken voice, and putting her out of the door mutters: "It is over; François can be trusted. To-morrow she will be out of Russia, but *I* shall be one of the chain journeying to the ice and snow of Asia—or *worse!*" For he knows that his chances are nearly nothing at this moment, when military rule is the only law, and many are sequestered and punished without trial, and even France cannot interfere to protect its citizens in Russian territory against Russian law.

"My God!" he cries out, "I'll not go there! Maurice de Verney was not born to be a slave in a quicksilver mine!"—then thinks a moment very hard, and suddenly utters: "The portfolio of a minister of police some-

times contains secrets that *save* as well as destroy! Let's look at Dimitri's pocket-book!"

Getting this, he examines quickly the papers within it, and after a few moments cries out, his eyes getting big with astonishment: "Dimitri Menchikoff wrote the message on those napkins himself. The handwritings are too similar to doubt it. *That's why he could read them at an impossible distance!*" Then he goes on with his investigation—discovering within the lining of the wallet, carefully hid away, two letters on tissue, paper in Russian that he cannot decipher, but dated two months ago from Odessa. Next looks over some other papers that he can read, and cries: "Another and another proof. Dimitri, the arch villain, and Hermann, the lower rogue, the spy. It's simple as day. Dimitri has ordered this circle to meet, that he may force Ora to be his bride or die, and her estates pass to him."

"I'll write an explanation to this!" which he does in ten lucid lines, and inserts this with the papers in the pocket-book, thinking: "If I could get these to Gourko, the Czar's lieutenant; he is a soldier—severe, but just!" But a moment after he mutters despondently: "I cannot pass the cordon of police and Dimitri's order. If he is dead, quick and secret punishment for the Frenchman! I shall never see her again. There is no hope!"

But as he says this a pair of arms are clasped around him, and Ora is looking into his face. He cries to her: "You here? The police refused to let you pass—the talisman I gave you did not open the gates?"

But she says: "I did not use it. I saw you steal it from Beresford. I did not believe your tale, and so I read your letter. The first two lines ordered François to get me out of Russia to-night; the second four left everything you possessed to me! Maurice, it was your last will and testament! Then I knew you were chained to this place and destruction, and I—I came back to share the fate of the man whose whole thought was for me and my whole heart was for him. That's why I am here! I stay by you, my promised husband, till—the end!"

And, looking very noble, the girl gazes admiringly, but determinedly, at him.

"Then by that title I command you to obey me!" he cries to her. "Now, while you have yet time!" For

by the noises coming in at the window he knows that the police, having done their work in the grounds, are now entering the house.

But she throws the napkin on the floor, and answers resolutely: "How can I go without *that?*"

"If not for your safety, for mine!" whispers Maurice desperately. "Take this pocket-book to the French minister; tell him to get it to Gourko, with the napkin, and the man Hermann, now in charge of François, as evidence of the truth of what I have written, and it may save *me!* Ah! now you will go!" he cries, as the girl says: "Yes—to save you—ANYTHING!"

As this is taking place Vassilissa, still weak from her fainting, has come in to them, and the napkin is lying at her feet. As her mistress stoops to pick it up, the servant anticipates her, remarking: "This doesn't smell like the rest."

"The rest!" cries Ora.

"What have you done with them?" asks Maurice, like lightning.

"Gagged Dimitri with them. They killed him!" answers the woman.

"Is Dimitri dead?" mutters de Verney, and bolts to the silent figure in the bedroom.

A second's examination shows the brute is alive. Vassilissa had forced the chloroformed napkins into his mouth; the fumes from them had entered his nostrils and produced deathly insensibility, but not death itself.

Maurice, taking the napkins from his mouth, is about to return to the room, that they may use them to pass the police, but the noise on the stairs tells him—too late! He unmanacles and unbinds the insensible giant, and, concealing his bonds in the bedroom, comes quickly out to meet a spectacle.

Young Beresford bolts up the stairs, crying: "There are idiotic policemen arresting every one in the house! Get your passports ready, yer know!"

On the little balcony Feodor has just made awful work of an officer with his long Russian peasant's knife, but is now overpowered; while one of Ora's big flunkies is being led away across the lawn blubbering, like the great innocent sheep that he is.

At this moment Platoff and Zamaroff fly in also, mut-

tering: "The police have not been notified *by us*. We are lost!" and fall to cursing each other and that spy Hermann, who has run away.

As they do this the room is filled by men in the uniform of the Russian police, and one, a particularly active little fellow, springs into the music-room. The Russian hymn stops with a bang, and Louise's voice can be heard saying: "What do you mean by daring to lay hands on me? Do you know that I am the Princess Platoff?"

Then comes an ejaculation of surprise from the little policeman, but he drags her into the boudoir just the same: though there is now an astonished look on his face, which every now and then during all this business is turned upon her in curious wonderment.

While this has been going on, Victor Regnier, in the uniform of a sous-lieutenant of Russian gendarmerie, his countenance inflexible as ever, stands at the door. He coolly orders that no one be permitted to leave the room; and, coming to Ora—whom he has doubtless seen in her drives about the capital, for her beauty was on many lips—he says respectfully but firmly: "If alive, Prince Menchikoff is here! Countess Lapuschkin, this is your home!"

Maurice, at her ear, whispers: "Answer boldly!" and the girl, who stands very pale and quiet, replies: "This is my house, and Dimitri is here."

At these words Platoff and Zamaroff—who have been whispering earnestly to each other, and glaring astounded at de Verney, whom they thought gone about his business long ago, and now are convinced that he has been the ruin of their plot—begin to talk.

The prince crying out that his nephew has been most foully murdered, for they have heard Louise's Russian hymn,—and Zamaroff cringing up to the lieutenant and muttering: "By those people, your nobility!" pointing with his diamond-covered finger to Maurice and Ora.

While Platoff, who has caught a glimpse of the neighboring bedroom, adds: "Your superior officer lies dead in there!"

At this two of the policemen run to the bedside of the insensible giant.

One who has a Russian peasant's brain stands stupidly gazing at him, the other makes an examination.

Regnier cries sternly : " Seize every one in this room ! " And Beresford yells out : " Hold up, I'm an English diplomate, don't yer know ? "

" Prince Dimitri's orders are to arrest all here, and I obey them," returns the lieutenant firmly.

" How the deuce can Dimitri give orders if he's dead ? " ejaculates Cuthbert ; " I'm a British diplomatist, and I'll trouble you to remember——"

But Maurice suddenly interposes : " One moment, Regnier ! "

And to this the policeman responds with an uncompromising bow, saying : " Monsieur de Verney, I believe ; though I've not seen you for years, I am very sorry to see you here—but you know I always do my duty. You are the Frenchman Prince Dimitri's order especially charged me in case he died to remove secretly."

He gives a sign, and two of the men approach Maurice and would seize him, and Ora also; for the girl has glided to him as if to protect him; but Maurice cries: " One moment ! " so commandingly that the policemen for a second pause and gaze at him, as he now shoots straight at Regnier these words : " I know you have two sets of orders—I saw them written in this room and thrown to you from that window : one in case Dimitri is alive, one in case Dimitri is dead ! Before you act on the last, Regnier "—here his *débonnaire* manner and tone coming back to him, he laughs—" just be kind enough to make sure Prince Dimitri *is* dead—see for yourself ! "

But as Regnier dashes aside the curtains cutting off the bedroom, a little policeman meets him at the door ; and saluting, cries : " Prince Menchikoff is alive, but *insensible!* " in a voice that makes Maurice start, for it is the same that warned him he was watched the night before. He hasn't much time to think of this, however; for now he is preparing to rattle all their brains with a series of tremendous lies !

This declaration makes a great effect upon Zamaroff, Platoff, and his wife. And now de Verney gives both police and conspirators another. He remarks calmly : " *Chloroformed!* "

At this some of them utter a cry ; and Regnier, running in to his superior officer's prostrate form, comes

back again and says : " You are right, I smell the fumes about his bed ! "

" Precisely ! " returns Maurice, an inspired lie coming to him like a flash of genius; " *chloroformed, at his request, by* ME ! "

Then there is a murmur of amazement from them all; and Ora, astounded, would gasp " You ? " did not his quick hand clasp hers with warning pressure.

" Yes, chloroformed ! " he cries ; " to prevent his murder by the scoundrels you have arrested outside, and these that you will now arrest *inside !* Each knew it was to be done by his circle, and each thought the other had committed the crime, and so *did not kill !* "

Here Zamaroff squirms out : " Do I look like a man who would kill anything ? "

And Sergius, who has been eyeing de Verney viciously, returns : " These are lies ! "

" I'll prove them to be the truth by Dimitri's written orders, Regnier," says Maurice coolly to the lieutenant. Then he turns to Ora and says : " What are you to me ? "

And the girl answers, a little blush coming over her pallor : " I am your affianced wife ! " then droops her head, but in a moment gazes up, startled at his astounding words ; for he explains : " This lady asked me to save her cousin from these conspirators. I was comparatively a stranger to Prince Dimitri. He said : ' You were once connected with the French police and are my cousin's *fiancée*, I will trust you.' I said : ' You *shall* trust me. Make my safety depend upon your own before you put yourself without sense or power into my hands. Write two sets of orders—one to be acted on if I betray you and you die ; the other in case I save you and you live ! ' "

Here Zamaroff and Platoff give a ghastly laugh, and Regnier looks searchingly at Maurice and remarks curtly : " A risky experiment for you, Monsieur de Verney."

Ora and Vassilissa are both gazing at him astounded ; the peasant woman muttering to her honest self : " What a great liar ! ". And the girl of his heart thinking : " What a noble one ! "

On them the chevalier smiles, and remarks to Regnier ; " I had to take the risk ; my *fiancée* implored me to save her cousin."

At this Ora cries, "Oh, Maurice!" in wonderment, and de Verney gives an atrocious grin and mutters: "The word *fiancée* always makes her bashful *now*." Then he goes on: "I had no fear either of Dimitri, myself, or you, Regnier. I knew you always obeyed orders exactly. You have your orders in case Prince Menchikoff lives."

"And will execute them to the letter," remarks the precise sub-officer.

"Then permit me to offer you, on behalf of the Comtesse Ora, her maid and myself, three passports," murmurs de Verney.

"Passports in this house are of no use under my orders!" returns Regnier. "You'll have to wait until Prince Menchikoff recovers."

"Not passports on *linen?*" suggests the chevalier, producing the three napkins.

"Ah! these I understand," remarks Regnier, and, comparing them with his sample one, he says: "You can go!"

On hearing these words, Platoff and Zamaroff have each glided to the sofa, under the cushions of which de Verney discovered his third napkin, and are fighting silently and desperately to get at what they think will save them from arrest.

Now they break forth.

"I left mine here!" cries the prince to Regnier.

"That is mine! I call Heaven to witness!" screams Zamaroff.

"Dog! You lie!" shouts Platoff, and smites the financier down; then, tearing up the cushions and finding nothing, he grows pallid with despair, and advancing on Maurice, who is gazing at him with contempt in his eyes, he mutters to the lieutenant of police: "Those very things you call passports are proof of guilt, and have treason written on them in sympathetic ink, visible only when held to the fire!"

"If this is true I cannot let you go, Monsieur de Verney," says Regnier sternly.

And Sergius chuckles hoarsely: "We both fall together!"

"We'll try 'em," cries Maurice; and, taking care not to use the one he got from Beresford, he springs to the fire and desperately tests the truth of Hermann's science.

Regnier gazes at the linen as it is exposed to the heat, and after a few moments says sharply: "There is not a trace of writing!"

And Maurice under his breath murmurs: "What a boon is chloroform to humanity!" Next he calls out hurriedly: "Vassilissa, the traveling-bag! Comtesse, my arm!" For this delay has told terribly on their chances—time is the very essence of life to them now.

Crossing to offer his support to Ora, who has watched all this, sometimes with despair, sometimes with hope, but always with amazement, de Verney chances to glance through the half-drawn curtains upon the arbiter of their fate, and sees a sight that strikes him cold.

Assisted by the policemen, the effects of the chloroform are passing away. DIMITRI MENCHIKOFF IS RAPIDLY REGAINING HIS SENSES!

Maurice knows that, long before he can get these two women on board and the yacht under way, the prefect of police will be in condition to telegraph his central office in St. Petersburg and arrest their flight.

But at this supreme moment the superb resources of this man's mind are more potent than ever. He thinks very hard for two seconds; then, forcing the tremor from his voice, calls out: "Regnier, I see your chief is getting his senses again."

At this Ora utters a low cry, which is checked by astonishment as he goes on easily and naturally: "The countess and myself will wait till her cousin recovers, and go into town with him!"

"Please yourself," remarks Regnier, who is now busy with Platoff's and Zamaroff's protests against arrest.

Then Maurice steps quietly but quickly to where Louise is pleading, as for her life, with Beresford for the *gage d'amour* she had given him. "By the love of heaven, it is my liberty!" she whispers with white lips; for just here Regnier cries out to Sergius: "If you have not one of these, you are my prisoner! Clap the irons on him."

From her entreating arms Maurice drags the young Englishman. As he does so, she catches sight of the little finger of his right hand and screams out: "I know you!" then laughs. "The American lady told me what a baseball finger is. When he wakes up, I'll tell him who

broke his shoulder. Dimitri 'll love you for that!" Then she would follow Cuthbert, begging and imploring, but a little policeman—the one who pulled her from the music-room, the one whose voice is familiar to de Verney—stands in her way and says sternly: "Sit down till your turn!"

Apart from the rest Cuthbert whispers: "My napkin, old fellah!"

And Maurice returns very earnestly and very quickly, gazing with pleading eyes at this man, upon whom his last hope hangs: "What would you do to save an innocent girl from death or Siberia?"

"Good God!"

"What would you risk?"

"Anything! Everything!"

"Then you can pass the police here with that!" and he gives him the napkin he had stolen from him, the one free from the action of chloroform, and upon which the nihilist message still remains. "Mount one of the police horses in the park! You can ride?"

"Ride! I am an English fox-hunter!"

"Then ride, as if you were after the gamest fox in England, straight to the French Embassy. Give to the French minister in person this pocket-book!" He hands him Dimitri's, with all the papers of the prefect of police. "Tell him the Hermann mentioned in my memorandum is locked up under care of François, my servant; that, if I am not in his presence in two hours, to take in person that pocket-book, *your* napkin, and Hermann to General Gourko, who is a soldier and not a policeman, or he will never look on his old friend Maurice de Verney again. Now, God bless you!"

And Cuthbert, muttering "I understand!" strides to Regnier, shows him his napkin, and, passing the police on guard at the door, is on his way to the embassy.

While Maurice, looking after his vanishing form, thinks: "I and two women could never reach the yacht in time, but this man on horseback may get to the French minister before Dimitri can stop him." Then he passes to the side of his half-fainting sweetheart and murmurs, "Courage!" takes a look at Menchikoff, who is now moving his limbs uneasily on the bed, and whispers to Vassilissa: "To the window in the dressing-room. From

it you can see the bridge to Petrofskoi Island. Apparently pack up some more of your mistress's things, but keep your eye on that bridge. When Beresford passes, come to the door of the dressing-room and look at me!"

The girl passes into the little room, and Maurice takes a cigar from his case and pulls himself together for this last round for the safety of her whom he adores; for Menchikoff will very soon be his own savage self again.

He sits and thinks, hardly noticing the scene about him, that is now one of awful intensity.

Zamaroff, despite his cries that he is a government contractor, has been bound and tossed into a corner, where he moans: "They will confiscate for this;" and Regnier has just turned to Louise, and, being prompted by the little policeman, has recognized, and is regarding her with a sinister glance. He laughs harshly: "An old friend of ours, Monsieur de Verney."

But Maurice is too anxious to answer him.

Then he says sneeringly: "Who is this so-called Russian princess," for he thinks now she must be some mistress of Platoff, not his wife, "as much a conspirator as the *fleurette* of the Jardin d'Acclimatation?"

And she proudly cries: "I was born a socialist. My father died on a barricade in Paris in '48. His blood, as they bore him from the carriage of that fatal street, fell on a babe in my mother's arms, and baptized me a hater of the rulers of this world—and their *policemen!*"

"Take the woman away and bind her," says Regnier, and two policemen just seize her in time, for she would spring at him; and as they drag her back and tie her white wrists with cords, she writhes out to Ora, who is gazing as if fascinated by the horror of this thing: "They'll do the same for you, in spite of that Frenchman, in a minute, you white-robed innocent!"

But now over this scene comes faintly in from the hanging draperies: "Regnier, to my aid! Guard all the doors!"

And Maurice knows that Dimitri is awake, but Cuthbert has not yet passed the police on the bridge; Vassilissa has as yet given no signal.

As the sub-officer cries out: "Already done, my chief!" Ora staggers to de Verney, and whispers: "You have destroyed yourself, and have not saved me,"—but the

love-look she gives him makes him almost happy, even in the suspense and misery of this moment.

He says to her almost lightly : " Wait and see ! " Then, leaving her astonished, he crosses to the door of her dressing-room and looks in ; seeing Vassilissa with her eyes out of the window, he turns, his unlighted cigar in his hand, and Dimitri Menchikoff, supporting himself by the draperies of the *portière*, is gazing at him with gloating eyes and muttering : " BOTH HERE ! By the Devil ! This is delightful ! "

At this there is a beseeching cry from the prisoners, who would fall at his feet ; but he says sharply : " Keep them back—I've something more pleasing to attend to now ! "

" Glad to see you better, prince," cries Maurice ; " your cousin and I delayed our departure till you recovered. We'll all ride in together. May I trouble you for a light for my cigar, Dimitri ? " and comes toward him, affably holding out a hand, and murmuring : " Got any matches, Dimitri ? Pleasant dreams, Dimitri ? " For he wishes to keep Monsieur Menchikoff's mind free from anything else but him for a few moments more.

At this astounding reception, the prefect of police at first stares at him as if he were not for the moment sure he were yet awake ; then, being convinced of his senses, he mutters : " This effrontery is useless, Frenchman, my promise is revoked ! "

" And so is mine ! " returns Maurice calmly.

And one, a woman among the prisoners, rolls her haggard eyes at him, and screams out : " No mercy on that Frenchman ; he it was who broke your shoulder in Paris —THE MASKED WRESTLER ! "

At this Dimitri cries : " Another score to settle ! " and, coming up to Maurice, hisses : " Audacity shall not save you ! You and that other one," he points to Ora, who is drooping with destroyed hope, " go together to——"

" To Paris—on our wedding tour ! " laughs de Verney, though his face is pale ; Vassilissa is so long coming.

At this the girl screams despairingly : " Don't talk of that *now !* "

And Menchikoff in a hoarse voice mocks her with " Your wedding tour shall be Siberia ; your bridal couch a quicksilver mine ; my wedding present shall be——"

But Maurice strides up to him and whispers: "Beware of Siberia yourself! You forget *your pocket-book!*"

"My pocket-book you robbed me of! Another crime on your shoulders!" cries Dimitri.

"You forget *its contents!*" continues de Verney. "You forget that the nihilist order on each of these napkins was written BY YOU! That the roll of to-morrow's chain for exile contains the names of all those prisoners!" Here he points to Platoff, Zamaroff, and the rest; and indignation coming to him, he cries out: "With a blank space to receive that of this poor girl—your cousin—in case she refused to become your unhappy bride! My God! when I think of it I wonder how I spare you!"

"Spare *me!*" laughs Dimitri. "But what's the use of words? Search him!" he orders sharply.

"Ah, yes. You're mighty anxious for that pocket-book!" and to Menchikoff's astonishment as well as dread—for he does not like the easy *insouciance* of this Frenchman—de Verney whistles an air from Offenbach, while the officers hurriedly search him from head to foot. He makes no resistance. This affair takes time, and time is what he wants for Cuthbert to pass the bridge. Dimitri is playing his game for him.

In a few moments, however, Maurice is deftly examined; and every document he has on his person being placed before Menchikoff, he looks over them and mutters: "It is not here. My God!—not here!" and for a moment trembles, while over his shoulder de Verney whispers:

"It is in France!"

And Dimitri cries out astounded, "What!"

Vassilissa has signaled from the door of the room: "Cuthbert has passed the bridge!"

"The residence of the French minister under the flag of France is FRANCE!" says Maurice pointedly.

He gets no farther, for Menchikoff calls out: "Regnier, has any one left this room?"

"I permitted an English attaché, under your orders!"

"Signal them to stop him at the bridge!" Dimitri cries to his men on the balcony; but they cry back to him: "It is too late!"

"If in two hours the French minister does not see me,

he will deliver that pocket-book, a napkin, and Hermann, your spy, to General Gourko in person ! " cries de Verney.

But, to his horror, Menchikoff only looks relieved, and sneers: " Hermann is not my spy ! " Then says shortly : " Seize that man ! " And turning to Ora, who gives a shudder at this, Dimitri cries: " Why has that woman not been secured before ? "

At this the room appears to swim to Maurice ; his bloodshot eyes see two officers, one of whom has his love's hands in his, the other holding out a cord to bind them, and Dimitri, like the arch-fiend, looking laughingly on, while all the time his brain is crying to itself : " Why was he frightened *at first* and easy *now ?* "

But here hope that has died to him lives suddenly again ! At Menchikoff's order a little policeman has thrown himself on him, and is clutching his arms, as if he would manacle him alone, and whispering to him from behind his ear : " How did he write that order from the National Committee if he wasn't one of them ? Were there not letters from Odessa ? Know that you can trust me by THIS ! " and he flashes before de Verney's astounded eyes a ruby ring, that Maurice remembers with a quick start of joy, and whispers on again : " Now dash me off, *and play the card !* "

At this he is apparently thrown in a heap to the floor as Maurice springs to Dimitri, and, seizing him by the shoulder, whispers : " You idiot ! Did you suppose I wished to tell your secret to all these policemen ? That would mean your ruin ! "

" My secret ! " gasps Dimitri, getting deadly white.

" This way for *your own safety !* " And Maurice drags him, astounded and faltering, to the little alcove where Ora's patron saint looks down upon these two men who are fighting—one to save, the other to destroy her.

" Now, here's your secret I sent to the French minister —YOU ARE A NIHILIST YOURSELF," whispers de Verney. And the other mutters: " For God's sake, speak lower ! "

" Ah ! I knew my shot would make a bull's-eye ! I knew I had you, or why did I wait here ? Hermann was *not* your spy ! *I* wanted you to acknowledge that before all these witnesses ! Then how did you know enough to write an order to an outside circle yourself, if you were

not a member of the National Executive Committee—*the highest group of nihilists ?* "

" I—you see——"

" And then those letters from Odessa ! By heavens ! what will Gourko—what will the Czar—think when he sees them ? " laughs Maurice, hurriedly but triumphantly.

" I—I joined them to betray them ! I was about to expose them ! I wished to know Platoff's plans before I——"

" Acted. Precisely ! But those letters from Odessa were dated two months ago. You can tell this to Gourko and the Czar. They're so confident of everybody *now!*—they'll believe you ! " jeers Maurice.

" Very well, you shall have safety to leave the country."

" Without her ? Never ! I'll have all I want or nothing ! Tell your men to arrest me," sneers Maurice.

But Dimitri, upon whose brow there are now drops of cold perspiration, and who in truth only had become a nihilist to learn his uncle's plans, and so destroy him and force Ora to be his bride, remembers with a shudder that the very name *nihilist* would be enough to condemn a prime minister or a field marshal, now that the Czar is trembling for his life—and he cries, " No ! No ! "

" Then order your men to—" says Maurice, with a savage voice ; and Dimitri flies at his policemen, crying : " Dogs, release that lady ! "

He is just in time. In another instant Louise's prophecy would have been fulfilled.

The girl staggers to Maurice, and whispers, confidently, "My savior ! " for Dimitri is one of those who either bully or cringe, and he is cringing to her now.

" Vassilissa," cries Maurice, " carry your mistress' satchel and some furs to the carriage—and you'd better pack up another dress or two. We shall have a few minutes yet."

At this Ora gives a sigh of impatience, and Menchikoff mutters : " I—I thought you were to be at the French minister's ? "

" Oh, yes ! within two hours ; and the ride can be made in thirty minutes with ease. How desperately anxious you are to get me away, my dear prince ! I am only stopping for one thing."

" What is that ? " asks Dimitri, looking uneasy.

" Your signature to *this !* " And de Verney, placing

Ora on a sofa, sits at a table, writes a few lines, and murmurs : " Just sign that, prince, and away we go for Paris. By the bye, you may also, while you've pen in hand, *visée* the passports of Gourko for foreign travel, that I took the liberty of filling up while you were asleep in there ! "

And Dimitri, looking at this document that de Verney has written, grows red and pale, and he ejaculates : " It is my consent to my cousin marrying you ? "

" Precisely."

" By Heaven, I'll—I'll not sign it ! "

" By Heaven, you will ! or I stay here until you do. Every moment you keep me waiting shortens the time which I have to prevent Gourko seeing your pocket-book."

And Maurice would sink lazily into a chair ; but now, with a muttered oath, Dimitri seizes the pen, and signs paper and passports too. Then, thrusting them into de Verney's hand, he cries, " GO ! "

" Ah, who is the older policeman *now ?* " smiles Maurice. " Menchikoff, remember that the noblest duty of the police is neither to find the criminal nor to punish crime, but to save—the *innocent !* " And, encircling with his arm the maiden his love has won, he supports her to the door ; while her eyes, like the stars of the night, beam in unutterable reproach upon this man, whose blood should have made him her protector instead of her destroyer. And, as she passes from his vision, Dimitri, to whom her losing makes her more beautiful than ever, watches her as a lonesome devil would one of the houris of heaven torn from his grasp.

So they pass out from the room with its stern policemen and fettered criminals, who now give out a groaning shriek, for Dimitri has looked around for his revenge, and, seeing them helpless to his hand, has laughed out in a horrid voice : "*And now* THE PRISONERS ! "

Hurrying her away from these cruel noises, de Verney places Ora in the carriage that is ready for them, for the girl is now almost fainting, the shadow of an awful fate has been so near to her.

But as they are driving away, Menchikoff comes hurriedly out upon the balcony and cries to Regnier : " An armed escort for Monsieur de Verney and suit, to town ! "

"Ah, you fear I will not see the French minister in time!" replies Maurice with a little grin.

Then Dimitri, running down to their carriage, shoves in the bracelet of gold, and mutters: "A cousin's wedding present; and Maurice, my kinsman—that—that pocket-book——"

"I will keep so long as you are prefect of police," remarks de Verney. "It is the greatest safeguard to my wife's estates, and I am Frenchman enough to like a *dot!*" And would drive away; but Ora suddenly cries: "I—I can't take a present from your hand!" and gives back the bauble; then tears that she had never shed for herself pour from her eyes, and her woman's heart sobs out a prayer to Dimitri for mercy for his prisoners. "Remember, one is of our blood," she supplicates.

"Yes; he who married a flower-girl, and degraded a *boyard* family," he answers with a scowl. "We know all about Louise; eh, Maurice!" and so goes back to do his pleasure on his prey.

To this de Verney says nothing, but calls to the coachman: "Quick! The French Embassy!"

Their thirty minutes' drive seems but five. Ora's head is nestled against Maurice's shoulder; he is explaining something to her that at first makes her give a sudden cry, as if of affright. But after a few moments she bows her head, and murmurs: "You have a right to my life: you saved it!" And her face and neck grow rosy with sudden blushes, as she whispers something in his ear that makes him look a conqueror.

So they come to the French Embassy, where, leaving Ora and Vassilissa together in a little parlor, Maurice walks into his Excellency's private office, and finds that gentleman striding up and down the floor uneasily, with Mr. Beresford and François looking at him.

On seeing de Verney, he cries: "By George! Escaped from the Russian bear, eh!" then says thoughtfully: "I'm glad I didn't have to do your bidding. I think there's a little mistake in your memorandum. These papers of Monsieur Dimitri mean *something else!*"

"So they do! I made a mistake; but Menchikoff thought I hadn't," laughs Maurice. "But excuse me one moment, your Excellency;" and he takes François aside, and gives him an order that astounds him.

Then his man having gone on the errand, he says: "With your permission I'll write the proper explanation to the mystery of the pocket-book;" which he hurriedly does, and hands it to the French minister.

"Ah!" remarks his Excellency, "as I thought;" then he whispers: "This should be told his government. Prince Menchikoff is a nihilist!"

"Oh, he only affiliated with them to rob me," laughs Maurice; then, after this astounding sentence, he gives them another, for he says earnestly: "Lock these up in your strongest safe, for I believe they are practically 'the deeds to my wife's estates.'"

"Your wife?" cries his Excellency, astonished.

"My future wife's—I beg your pardon; but the time is so near, I've begun to think of her as such already. I'm to be married in ten minutes!"

"Not here!" says the minister shortly. "I'll give the Russian Government no cause for ill feeling."

But Maurice returns: "This will, I hope, change your mind;" and he shows him Dimitri's written consent to his cousin's marriage. Then he concisely tells his Excellency the extraordinary events of the afternoon, and, getting this genial old gentleman to hemming and hawing and considering, he brings him to Ora, and her beauty settles the matter. The minister cries: "By the Lord! I'll stand between no Frenchman and such loveliness!" for the girl is now radiant, like the sunshine after a storm.

And so François having done his errand, and brought the clergyman who officiates at the legation to them, with little Beresford excitedly acting as best man, and his Excellency giving the bride his blessing and a fatherly kiss, Maurice de Verney and Ora Lapuschkin are made one by the forms of man and the ritual of the holy Church.

This ceremony is hardly over before he whispers something to his minister, who says: "Yes! The sooner the better for your safety—all things considered." And then remarks: "Why not take Dimitri's pocket-book with you?"

"What? And be robbed of it going to the yacht! I'll not take the chances! You'll look after Ora's goods and chattels for me!" cries Maurice, who has given his Excellency his power of attorney.

And so they all drive down to the yacht together, the minister and Cuthbert going with them to see them on board the *Sophie* and wish them "*Bon voyage!*"

As Maurice had ordered, steam is up, and the boat is soon ready to leave her dock, the captain telling him that they have succeeded in shipping a cook only half an hour before.

So with British hurrahs from Beresford and warm clasps of the hand from all the rest, the *Sophie* shoots out from the English quay, and darts down the Neva between the granite docks of St. Petersburg.

A few minutes after, she is threading the channel over the bar, between its hundred buoys; and an hour from then, with Cronstadt upon her quarter, is driving, for everything she is worth, down the waters of the Finnish Gulf.

Ora has no appetite; she is only anxious to get away from her country and her home, and is watching the receding domes and spires of the capital that are sinking to the horizon; but Maurice, now that the strain is over, has become hungry, and is unromantically eating his dinner in the little cabin.

A few moments after, he comes on deck and says sternly: "That was the most atrocious meal in a life's experience! Send me the cook!"

Then he turns to her who has become his, and murmurs: "A good housekeeper, eh? Knowest thou how to make an omelet, my comtesse?" playing with the fairy ear that is on the head nestling against him. And the girl answers: "I never cooked in my life; but, if my lord will teach me, I'll make him an omelet to-morrow!"

"Pshaw!" laughs Maurice; "you shall break the eggs for me—we'll do it together—for this cook is an atrocity!"

At this time François, who has borne his message to the galley, comes to him with a curious grin on his face, and announces, "The cook!"

Hardly looking at the creature, who appears insignificant, de Verney bursts out: "Don't you know that garlic in an omelet for a bridegroom is an atrocity? You're a dishwasher, not a cook!"

But the man, who is in his shirt-sleeves, replies with a deprecating bow: "It is our Quartier Latin style—we always eat 'em so at Mig——"

But he gets no farther. At the voice, Maurice has turned at once, and, catching sight of a ruby ring conspicuously displayed in the other's vivacious gesticulation, has cried out, "Microbe!" Then it is not the little thief-taker who embraces the chevalier, but the aristocrat who seizes the thief-taker to his heart; and to Ora's astonished questions tells her that this vile cook is a good detective, who that day has done more for him than he can ever pay back to him.

Then he hurriedly asks: "Why did you come here?"

"He suspected me of aiding you and spying upon him; had I not escaped to-day I would never have seen my native France," says the little fellow. Then he goes on: "I hope you'll excuse the cooking; I am not in practice; but for to-morrow morning I am planning a *ragoût à la Mabille!* I hope you will forgive me for it."

"I'll forgive anything from you—short of poison," cries Maurice; "and perhaps we'll come in and help you," he adds, for he is desperately afraid of Microbe's *cuisine;* the dinner has been execrable.

"Ah! with madame—what honor!" says the little fellow, with a bow of pleasure. Then he points toward the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul—that Russian bastile of unutterable horrors, the distant spire of which is now gilded by the setting sun—and mutters: "He has them there now!" shudders and walks forward.

Gazing at this, the awful memories of the day come back to her, and Ora gasps to Maurice: "From which you saved me—my Frenchman!" Then, the strain being almost over, with a little peaceful sigh as if she were very tired and very content, she sinks almost fainting into his arms, that clasp about her with the joy of victory and conquest, as he gazes on the wondrous beauty that is his.

And on them the same red sunlight that gilds the spire of the Russian prison falls and makes a halo about these two, flying as fast as steam will drive them over a summer sea toward those lands that God has blessed by that one boon that makes the chief good of life—LIBERTY!

FINIS.

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